Suspicion Aroused

By Dick Donovan

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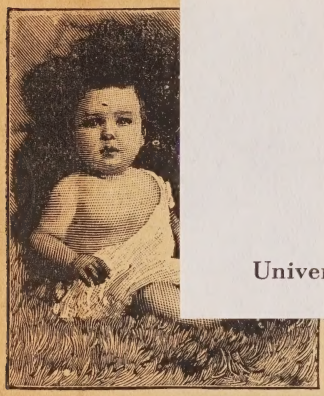

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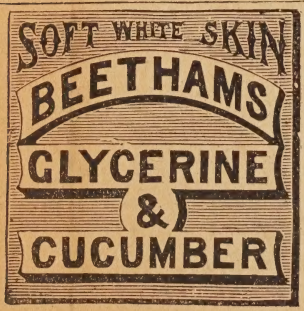

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SUSPICION AROUSED

BY

DICK DONOVAN

AUTHOR OF "THE MAN-HUNTER," "CAUGHT AT LAST," "TRACKED AND TAKEN," "WHO POISONED HETTY DUNCAN?" "THE MAN FROM MANCHESTER,' "TRACKED TO DOOM," "A DETECTIVE'S TRIUMPHS," "WANTED!" "IN THE GRIP OF THE LAW," "FROM INFORMATION RECEIVED," "LINK BY LINK," ETC.

London
CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY
1893

Dick Donovan is said to be the same as J. E. Muddock. This is so. Muddock (his real name) was born at Southampton in 1843. He has travelled much and written many different works.

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SUSPICION AROUSED.

SPOILING THEIR GAME.

One autumn evening I was waiting on the railway platform at Edinburgh for the train to London, having about a quarter of an hour to spare, and, in accordance with my wont, I was deeply interested in the many different types of my fellowmen who constantly passed and repassed before me. I don't know of any place where the leading characteristics of individuals display themselves so prominently as they do at a railway station. It is a place where less politeness and more selfishness is shown than anywhere else. I was particularly amused with a lady of uncertain age, and of the gorilla order of beauty, who, surrounded by many parcels, bundles, and wraps, had button-holed a porter, who, in view of the probable "tip," was exercising his patience as best he could.

"Is this the London train, porter?" asked the lady.

"Yes, mum."

"When does it start?"

"In ten minutes, mum."

"From here?"

"Yes."

"Will you get me a seat?"

"What class, mum?"

"Third, of course."

Here the porter began to gather up her many packages when she exclaimed—

"Oh, porter, don't handle those things as if they were sacks of coal; and, look here, be sure you don't let that brown paper parcel fall, because there is something in it that will break."

The porter made no response, but opened the door of a third class compartment, when the lady inquired—

"Is this a third class?"

"Yes, mum."

"It's not smoking, I hope?"

"No, mum."

"You are quite sure it's not a smoking carriage?"

"Perfectly sure."

"I think it is an abominable shame that the railway companies permit smoking at all on their railways."

"Will you sit with your back or face to the engine?" asked the porter.

"Which way does the train go?"

"That way."

"Then I'll sit with my back to the engine. No, I won't; I'll sit the other way." Here she almost broke into a scream as she exclaimed—"Porter, you told me this wasn't a smoking carriage."

"No more it isn't," answered the man, with a growl.

"But I am sure somebody has been smoking in it."

"Very likely, mum, we can't keep our eyes on everybody."

"Well, it's shameful, that it is! If I had my way I'd shoot all the men that smoked."

"Then there would be none left, mum, except a few male old women."

"And a good job too," said the lady snappishly.

"But the ladies wouldn't think so perhaps," suggested the porter slyly.

"Oh, women are fools!"

"Yes, mum, some of 'em are."

This particular lady did not notice the irony in the man's speech, and she insisted on having all her things removed into another compartment; and having again catechized the porter as to whether it was third class, non-smoking, and if he was sure it was the right train, how often did it stop, would she have to change carriages, what time did it arrive in the morning, &c., she fumbled in her pocket for her purse, and having found it, she presented the man with the munificent sum of a penny. Then she proceeded to settle herself in the seat, trying first one way, then another, next she banged the door and spread a rug over her knees, then she began to hunt about for her ticket, and having searched every place where it was not, and got very excited, she found it at last in her glove. Now a porter came up with another lady, and number one glowered and scowled as though she thought that the entrance of any one else into that particular compartment, in which she had a right to one seat only, was an outrageous intrusion not to be tolerated.

While I stood watching this scene and feeling highly amused, the stationmaster, with whom I was well acquainted, approached me.

"Good evening, sir," he remarked. "You are going up to the village, I think?"

"Yes; I have some business there."

"Well, your presence is very opportune."

"Indeed. Anything on?"

"Yes. I think, with your aid, we can accomplish

now what we have been long trying to accomplish; but you will appreciate the difficulties that lie in our way."

"Well, if I can be of any service, pray command me."

"I knew we could count on you, and you can, I believe, render the railway company a very great service indeed."

"Pray explain."

"Will you walk down the platform with me?" he answered. "There are still eight minutes to spare before the train starts."

Agreeable to this request, I strolled along with him for about fifty yards, when he stopped and pointed to a well-dressed man, wearing a handsome coat trimmed with fur at collar and cuffs, and carrying a costly railway rug over his arm. He was buying some papers at the bookstall, and had all the appearance of a well-to-do gentleman.

"You see that fellow?" whispered the station-master.

"Yes."

"Well, he is one of the most notorious cardsharpers in the whole of Great Britain, perhaps. He travels all over the country, and makes a fat living. He came down here a few days ago. He travelled here by the Great Northern, and fleeced some of the passengers. He is going up to town again to-night, and has a London and North-Western ticket. He has booked for Euston, but, of course, it is probable he may get out somewhere on the road if he has a good haul."

"If you know all this, why have you not arrested him before now?" I asked.

"Ah, that's where the difficulty is. Passengers who

have been fleeced won't take the trouble, or are too much ashamed of themselves to appear against him; and he is so cute and so sharp, that though we have set traps for him he has nosed them out, and would not be trapped."

"I understand. And so you want me to try what I can do?"

"Precisely."

"But I shall want the co-operation of the company."

"Oh, you can count on that, and the company will gladly defray every possible expense. There are a good many gentlemen returning to London to-night by this train, and this fellow hopes to make a rich haul. Will you undertake to spoil his little game?"

"I will try," I remarked, as I studied the face of the man in the fur-trimmed coat.

"He has a confederate," continued the stationmaster. "I haven't seen him yet on the platform, but no doubt he will turn up. As to how you will lay your trap that is a matter entirely for you to decide. I have no doubt at all you will be able to outwit him."

I felt a little flattered by the compliment, and requested the stationmaster to telegraph to all the stopping places on the route, and ask that a plain-clothes policeman might be on the platform in case I should require his services; and in order that I might recognize him, he was to tie a white pocket-handkerchief round his throat.

These preliminaries settled, the stationmaster left me, wishing me success, for he said that the sharper was an intolerable nuisance, and if legal evidence was only forthcoming, the fellow would get a long term of imprisonment. I kept my eye on the man whom I was so unexpectedly called upon to shadow, and I saw him

go up and down the platform, and peer into the different carriages as if selecting his victim. Then I saw another well-dressed man join him for a moment and whisper something to him. Whereupon number one went to a particular carriage in which were two young swells who seemed to belong to the aristocracy. Into this compartment the sharper got, and in a few moments I followed; and just as the train was in motion the confederate rushed up with a porter after him. The door was hurriedly opened, the confederate sprang in, the porter flung in a rug and bag after him, banged the door with that terrific bang which delighteth the heart of your railway porter so much, then the train increased its speed, and we were rushing forth into the night.

The confederate, breathless and apparently exhausted, sank down on the seat, and the sharper, with a pleasant smile, remarked—

"You've had a narrow squeak, sir."

"Yes, confound it!" gasped the confederate. "Saved it by the skin of my teeth only."

"Ah, there's nothing like punctuality," remarked the sharper, with the air of a benign philosopher. "A man has no business to be late."

"Hasn't he?" growled the confederate, looking fierce and angry. "I suppose you are one of the band-box sort of people who do everything with the precision of clockwork. Well, all I've got to say is I hate them."

"Well, you needn't be rude," answered the sharper, as he exchanged his well-polished tile for a travelling-cap, and began to spread his rug over his knees.

"Who the devil is rude?" demanded the confederate menacingly.

"You are!" was the sharp answer.

"You began it. I'm a stranger to you, and you had no business to make an offensive remark."

"I didn't!"

"Yes, you did!"

"Well, don't address yourself to me any more or I'll pull your nose!"

"Will you, by—"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," I interposed, "pray don't quarrel. I'm sure there is nothing to lose your tempers about."

"Oh, I don't want to quarrel," said the sharper.

"And I'm sure I don't," responded the confederate.

"That's all right, then," I said; "pray let the subject drop."

They each professed to be satisfied, and proceeded to settle themselves in their respective places.

Our fellow passengers were two fashionably-dressed young men, evidently brothers by the strong likeness they bore to each other; and from their costly rugs, their diamond rings and pins, they did not seem to lack this world's goods. These young men occupied a corner each, I and the sharper the other corners, and the confederate had a middle seat. It was not a smoking carriage, but presently the sharper drew out a cigar-case with a silver monogram on it, and asked if any one objected to smoking.

"Yes, I do," said the confederate.

The sharper appealed to me and the two young men, and as we offered no objection, he said, addressing his confederate—

"The majority is against you, sir. Therefore I shall smoke."

"And by heaven, if you do, I'll throw your cigar

out of the window, and lodge a complaint against you at the next station. I particularly requested to be put into a non-smoking carriage. I hate smoke."

"Gentlemen, what do you say?" exclaimed the sharper, and he produced a box of matches.

"Well, sir," I put in, "this gentleman is quite within his rights in objecting; therefore I think you ought not to smoke."

"All right," he remarked, with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders as he restored his smoking gear to his pocket again, and then, with a scowl at the confederate, he muttered—"You are a cad!"

"And you are a bully!" retorted the other.

This bit of acting was cleverly done, and simulated truth very closely; but I wasn't deceived by it, and I waited patiently for further developments. The sharper now settled himself snugly in his corner, pulled his cap down over his eyes, and pretended to sleep. After we had passed Melrose, however, he started up, appealed to his watch, yawned, and then remarked—

"This is dreadfully slow work. What do you say, gentlemen, to a game at cards—*pour passer le temps?*" Nobody spoke. "Will you play, sir?" This to me.

"No, thank you," I replied. "I don't care about it."

Then he asked the two young men, but they declined. For a moment or two he looked at his confederate as though it was in his mind to ask him, but finally, with a sneer and without speaking, he sank into his corner again. He did not remain inactive long, however, for once more he roused himself up, and appealing to the young gentlemen, he urged them to play, and opening a little black handbag he produced a pack of cards and a small

folding board covered with green baize. "Come on, let us have a game at Nap for penny points," he said as he began to shuffle the cards.

"No, I won't play. In fact, I don't understand Nap," answered one of the brothers.

"Nor I," said the other.

Then the sharper asked me, but I also declined, telling him I wished to sleep, as I was very tired.

"Well, well, this is extraordinary," he remarked dolefully, and he was about to restore the cards and board to the bag again, when he suddenly changed his mind, and, placing the board on his knees, he selected three cards, one the deuce of hearts, the other the three of clubs, and the third the knave of spades. Dexterously shuffling them about, he held them up, and showed them to us, then he turned them down on the board again and moved them quickly. "Now, gentlemen," he said, "I'll bet any one a level sovereign he can't pick out the knave." There was dead silence. No one offered to take the bet; no one spoke. "Well, upon my word," he exclaimed, "this is extraordinary," and once more he picked up the cards and held them before our eyes. "Come on, gentlemen. I'll give two to one. What do you say?"

"Will you give five to one?" asked the confederate.

"Do you think I'm a fool?" sneered the sharper. "Besides, I don't want to have anything to do with you."

"Don't you!" was the snarling answer. "Well, I do think you are a fool if you want me to reply to your question."

"Look here," cried the sharper, with suppressed passion, "have you a five-pound note?"

"What has that got to do with you."

"Pooh! I don't suppose you've got five pounds to bless yourself with."

"Don't you!"

"No, I don't. But if you have I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll bet you ten pounds to five you can't pick out the knave." He had shuffled the three cards again, and they were lying on the board. Suddenly the confederate stretched out his hand, placed it on the middle card saying—

"I'll take you on that bet. Gentlemen, you are witness—ten pounds to five. This is the card." Here he held up the card triumphantly, and sure enough it was the knave.

The sharper seemed furious.

"You took an unfair advantage there," he said, "and I won't pay."

"Won't you?" cried the confederate. "Then, by George, I'll give you in charge as a sharper!"

"Gentlemen, this man is a blackguard," said the sharper, with flashing eyes. "But there, I'll appeal to you and rest by your decision. If you say I ought to pay the ten pounds, I'll pay it."

We agreed that he should pay it, whereupon he opened a porte-monnaie, from which he took two crisp five-pound Bank of England notes, and tossed them at the confederate, who picked them up, examined them critically, and as he put them in his pocket, said—

"Ah, I had you there!"

"Well, now, look here," exclaimed the sharper, "I'll bet you fifty pounds to ten you don't pick out the knave again."

"I'm not such an idiot," said the confederate, with a provoking laugh. "I'm going to stick to that ten."

"Well, I hope it will do you good. Come on, sir, will you have a trial?" This to me.

I said "No," but said it in a way that seemed to imply I should like to do so. So he urged me strenuously, and at last I asked if he would give me ten to five, and he said he would. I therefore agreed to take the bet, so he proceeded to shuffle the cards, then dropped them on the board, and said—

"Now, sir. Which is the card?"

I picked up the right-hand one. It was the knave. "Give me ten pounds," I said.

He looked flabbergasted, and the confederate burst into a mocking roar of laughter, and said to him—"Well, you are a griffin. Why, you don't know how to do it."

The sharper made no reply to this, but seemed very downcast. However, he gave me two five-pound notes, which were genuine enough, and I put them into my pocket. As we were now nearing Carlisle, he restored the board and pack of cards to his bag. But ten minutes after we had left the station, in continuation of our journey, he got his stock-in-trade out again and told the confederate that he ought to give him a chance of winning back his money, but the confederate said he wasn't such a fool, and he intended to stick to the ten pounds. Then he tried me, but I expressed reluctance, and so he turned his attention to the two young gentlemen, and at last one of them was tempted, but he would only risk a sovereign, which he lost. Then the sharper said he would bet a level two, which was taken, and he exposed the right card so plainly that no one who watched could be mistaken, and the young fellow easily picked it out, and received the two pounds.

The bait having taken, the sharper made the best of

his opportunity, and the two brothers both made guesses. Sometimes they were right, and sometimes they were wrong. Money changed hands frequently, but neither side lost anything nor won anything. They kept even. I need scarcely say, perhaps, that I was not deceived by this. I was too well acquainted with the ways of sharpers to suppose that this rascal didn't know what he was doing. He believed he had got hold of two griffins, and he intended to pluck them. But it had to be done cautiously, or they might take fright. He now proposed that they should have an even bet of three pounds, which was accepted. The elder of the two brothers guessed first and lost. The second followed and lost also.

"Come, gentlemen, double or quits?" said the sharper, encouragingly.

The brothers assented, and again they lost.

"Double or quits again?" cried the sharper.

"Done!" said the brothers, who were getting a little desperate.

Again they lost.

"I'll continue; double or quits?" remarked the three-card man, in a benevolent tone.

"We'll take you," was the answer, and once again the sharper scored.

By this time the brothers had lost £24 each, and they looked somewhat disconcerted.

"Will you have another chance?" asked the younger of the two brothers.

"Certainly."

"Double or quits?"

"Certainly, my dear sir," answered the sharper, with a pleasant smile.

This time the luck turned. The brothers won, and

their faces beamed with smiles. The sharper took a leather case from his pocket and opened it. It seemed to be crammed with bank-notes, and he was about to count out the brothers' winnings when he stopped and said—

"Look here, gentlemen, give me my revenge. I'll bet you a level hundred each that you don't guess right in two times out of three."

The brothers, after a few moments' hesitation, consented.

They lost, of course, and the smile faded from their faces.

"That's a hundred and twenty-four each, gentlemen," remarked the sharper coolly and collectedly. "Shall we go on or stop?"

The brothers whispered together, then the elder said—"Yes, we'll go on if you like. I'll be responsible for the two payments, and I'll make it double or quits again."

To this the sharper affected to demur; but he knew his book too well to miss such a chance. He was perfectly well aware that all the odds were in his favour, and it was not often that he had the chance of making such a haul as he had now. So he consented with apparent reluctance. The cards were, therefore, shuffled, placed, and the griffin was told to select. It was an anxious and exciting moment. There was a nervous look in his eyes, and his face was anxious and pale. He made his selection. It was wrong.

"The luck's against you, sir," remarked the sharper pleasantly, "but it will come back. What do you say now, shall we continue?"

"Certainly," exclaimed the young man with dignity, as though he was too proud to confess his defeat.

"Good. What shall the betting be?"

"Double or quits."

"Good again! Come on, then. One, two, three. Now, then, which card will you take?"

The young man hesitated. The look of nervous anxiety in his face was pitiable. He knew that if he lost now his debt would be nearly a thousand pounds. It was a large sum to forfeit in such a foolish way; and perhaps it never occurred to him that the debt could not be legally enforced, nor, indeed, was he under any moral obligation to pay money for bets on cards under such circumstances. But it was plain to see that he was a man of good birth and breeding, and no doubt he would regard this as a debt of honour. He made his selection at last, and of course he chose the wrong card. The whiteness of his face increased, and he said—

"I have been a fool, but you shall have the money."

"Well, I'll give you one more chance," observed the sharper.

"No more chances," replied the young man firmly.

"As you will." Then, turning to me, he asked me if I would have a "flutter." I assented, and I lost the ten pounds I had won, and another ten pounds besides. I refused to continue, and as the confederate was apparently sound asleep, with his chin buried deep in his coat-collar, the sharper had no more worlds to conquer, so he put up his tools, and began to gather his small belongings together, saying—

"We're nearing Rugby. I get out here. Is it convenient, sir, for you to give me the money now?"

"No," answered the young man, "but here is my card. Give me your address, and I will send a cheque."

He handed the sharper his card. The fellow looked at it, and read off the name, "Henry, Lord ——." Then, as he put the card into his pocket, he said—"Good, my Lord. Your social position is a guarantee for the payment of this debt of honour. But perhaps your Lordship will kindly scribble me an I.O.U."

His Lordship complied with the request. He tore a leaf from his notebook, asked the man for his name, and received for answer, "Richard Waring Eastman." Then he wrote on the slip of paper :—

RICHARD WARING EASTMAN,
I.O.U.
Nine Hundred and Ninety-two Pounds (£992).
HENRY, LORD ——
Bruton Street, Mayfair, London.

Richard Waring Eastman took the document, scrutinized it to see that it was in order, and as he carefully placed it in his pocket-book, a look of keen satisfaction sat on his face.

"I am much obliged to you, my Lord," he said, "and I hope the next time you play you will be more fortunate. I will give you your revenge any time and anywhere."

"I shall not exact it," answered his Lordship loftily.

Eastman bowed, and shrugging his shoulders said—

"As you will. I have made the offer. I can do no more."

The train now began to slow down as we neared Rugby. Daylight was breaking. It was a beautiful, fresh morning, and there was a delicate flush in the sky. Everything stood out sharply and clear cut, and the lights of the town were paling before the dawn. As the brakes were applied more vigorously, the con-

federate, who had been sleeping through the scene I have described, sprang up with a start, and exclaimed—

"Hullo! what station is this?

"Rugby," I answered.

"By Jove! I get out here," he said, hastily folding up his rug, and lifting a small handbag from the rack. Then noticing that the sharper was prepared to leave the train, he said in well-simulated tones of surprise—"What, you don't mean to say you get out here, do you?"

"Why shouldn't I? Are you the only person privileged to get out at Rugby?"

"Oh dear, no!" answered the other, with a sneer of concentrated scorn.

Further conversation was prevented now by the train pulling up at the platform. Eastman handed his rug and other things to a porter, and then got out. His confederate followed, and I whispered hurriedly to Lord ——, saying, "Make your mind easy. You won't have to pay that money. Those two fellows are cardsharpers. I am a detective, and am going to arrest them."

His Lordship made some response, but I did not catch what it was, as I was anxious not to lose sight of my men. So I left the carriage, glanced about, and saw a tall, powerful-looking man coming towards me with a white handkerchief tied round his neck. I went to him.

"My name is Donovan," I said. "Get hold of that man," pointing to the confederate, who was some yards behind his companion, but both were making for the hotel, and no doubt were highly delighted with their night's work, which would have been only too successful if I had not spoilt their little game.

I hurried up to Eastman, laid my hand heavily on his shoulder, and said—

"I arrest you as a cardsharper and swindler."

The sudden and unexpected shock almost caused him to fall to the ground, and I noted that his face went as white as a sheet. He turned upon me fiercely and exclaimed—

"What do you mean, fellow?" Then, as he recognized me, he blanched still more, if that were possible, and with a sickly smile said—"Oh, I say, come, this sort of joking is not pleasant, you know. It's not even funny, and you may get yourself into trouble."

"No," I answered, "it's not funny nor pleasant for you; that I can well understand. You would rather be swindling that silly young gentleman, Lord ——, out of more money."

"Who are you, fellow?" he demanded savagely.

"A detective, who was put on your track at Edinburgh."

"You are a scoundrel, and are making a mistake for which you will have to pay dearly."

"I will risk all that," I remarked, as I gripped his arm tightly. He wrenched himself free, and seemed disposed to make off; but I seized him again, and as he offered some resistance I beckoned to an inspector, who grasped the situation at once, and between us we held the fellow until a policeman came up and handcuffed him. In the meantime, the other man had been secured, and they were at once conveyed to the station. The only luggage they had was a bag each and a few odds and ends. When they were searched, about a hundred pounds were found between them in Bank of England notes and gold; and they had a quantity of

most excellent imitation notes representing a sum of nearly two thousand pounds. In an uncertain light these notes might easily have been taken for genuine ones. In addition, several packs of cards were found in Eastman's bag, and, on examination, they were all found to be marked. There was also a box and some dice, a false beard and moustache, and an admirably made wig. The other fellow also had a false beard, moustache, and wig in his bag.

There was now not the slightest doubt that they were in league together, and unmitigated rascals, and the company's officers expressed their great satisfaction that they had at last been brought to book, for complaints about them had been numerous. But they had played their game once too often, and now the law stepped in and won.

Eastman turned out to be a fellow by the name of Arthur Blanch, who had suffered two years' imprisonment for swindling. He was well educated, having originally been a schoolmaster; but he had chosen to live by his wits, and though he must have had a pretty good harvest, retribution had at last overtaken him. His companion was an inferior rascal by the name of Thomas Atkinson. He, too, had suffered imprisonment. He had been a draper's assistant originally, and had robbed his master. He had met Blanch in prison, and they agreed to enter into partnership on their release. Blanch, having a good address and being rather an imposing-looking man, was the lion, while Atkinson was content to act the part of the jackal. Their plan of action was to travel on those lines where they were most likely to fall in with well-to-do people, and Atkinson prowled about the luggage vans to endeavour to find out by the names on the luggage if

any one of note was travelling in that particular train. By this means they became aware that young Lord —— and his brother were going from Edinburgh to London on the fateful night when chance gave them into my hands. Had it not been for my being in the compartment they would have had a very fine night's work indeed, and would certainly have netted that nine hundred and ninety-two pounds, for Lord —— was a very young and inexperienced man, and he had but recently come into the title and estates. I had some difficulty in getting him to appear against the prisoners, but he consented at last to do so, and with the evidence I was enabled to offer, and having regard to their previous convictions, they were both sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

AT THE DAWN OF DAY.

The romantic side of crime—and it must be admitted that it occasionally has a romantic side—has often been seized upon by writers for the purposes of fiction. But seldom or never do we hear of the poetical side. And yet dark deeds have been done which, when viewed from a certain standpoint, seem to possess all the elements of a poem—a tragic poem, it must be confessed. It is impossible, of course, to associate the villainy begotten of sordidness or the vulgar wickedness born of hungering greed with any of the sentiment which finds its expression in the poet's fancy; but where love—which, next to hate, is the strongest passion of the human heart—drives its victim to the commission of wrong-doing, the harshness and bitterness which one feels under ordinary circumstances are changed into pitying sorrow; and the recording angel, who notes men's evil deeds, may often perhaps drop a tear as he writes that "It was done for Love's sake."

The foregoing remarks suggest themselves to me as I recall all the circumstances of a strange case with which I was associated years ago. In a quaint old church that stands near one of the breezy wold villages of Yorkshire is a marble monument which at once puzzles the stranger, while it arouses his admiration. It is in itself a magnificent work of art, for it was executed by no less an artist than the world-renowned Italian sculptor Torcielli. It is, indeed, a poem in

stone, and yet it embodies the story of the strange crime which forms the subject of this paper. The village itself is old fashioned and dreamy, and the church solemn and silent. It was reared in a far-off age, and the men who builded so well and strong have long since entered into rest. Ivy covers its walls; ancient yews enshadow it; and beneath its floor is the dust of generations of villagers, who loved and hated, worshipped and wept, laughed and sang, until their sands ran out and the Great Smiter smote them, and in the hallowed precincts of that old church they were returned to the earth from which they sprang. The least reverential stranger who enters the holy fane must feel the effects of the solemnity of the subdued light which is filtered through the magnificent stained-glass windows, embodying a soul-thrilling story of the Passion; and he will tread with muffled footfalls as he notes that the whole floor is one huge tombstone, recording that beneath are the ashes of hundreds of human beings. If it be a summer day, he will hear the birds outside singing a passionate melody of joyous life; but the sad swaying of the whispering trees will somehow remind him that the world is a world of death, in which life is but a transient shadow. Brasses and marble tablets affixed to walls bear the names of hundreds of well-known Yorkshire families. Here is one to a gallant soldier who fell in his country's cause on the burning strand of India; there another to an equally gallant sailor, who, knowing not the meaning of the word "defeat," blew up his ship rather than let it fall into the hands of his enemies; and here in a dim corner is another, which tells how a pious lady gave up all the comforts and pleasures of a luxurious home to go forth amongst sickness, want, and disease, in order that by

her gentle presence and ministering hand she might alleviate mortal misery. Beautiful she was, and wealthy and clever, but long ere she had reached the noon of life she fell a victim to her devotion, being stricken down by a pestiferous disease which she contracted in a city slum. But these pathetic records, telling of duty done nobly, of life lived well, of death met bravely, will probably fade from the memory of the visitor as soon as he passes from the dim religious light, so suggestive of death, into the glare of day again; though there is one monument there he will continue to see in his mind's eye so long as he may live. It stands in a niche near the communion rails, and it is so placed that a softened and chastened light, from a small window near the roof, falls full upon it. On a solid block of marble are two life-size figures. One is that of a young and beautiful girl with a wealth of magnificent hair flowing down her back, the other is a young man. They are rushing towards each other with outstretched arms, and on the face of each is an expression of seraphic joy. There is no record of any kind on this unique monument, but in deeply-carved letters is the simple line—

"At the Dawn of Day."

The monument is at once a poem and a puzzle. As a work of art it is superb; and artists, sculptors, and poets have made pilgrimages to see it. But the ordinary visitor is impressed with a sense of something wanting. He is confronted with a problem where of all places in the world he least expects to find a problem carved in stone. But that monument is eloquent of a sad and pathetic story, which I now propose to tell.

It was an early spring morning, I remember, that a

gentleman called upon me, and in an abrupt and unceremonious way said—

"I am a man of few words. My niece and ward, Miss Blanche Harley, aged eighteen, has clandestinely left my roof and care, and I have reason to believe she has gone off to join a rascal who, without my consent and against my will, has been making love to her. As the girl is a ward in Chancery, and I have been appointed her guardian under an order of the Court, she can be brought back under a warrant, and the fellow who has taken her off will be severely punished."

The speaker—Major-General Panton, retired—was a tall, straight, grizzled man, with a hard, stern face, cold, piercing grey eyes, thin lips, and a general suggestiveness in his manner and address of being very determined and possessed of an unpoetical and unsympathetic nature. He looked like one who had been born to command, and who could make his power felt and respected. The result of my interview with him was that I gathered the following particulars. He represented a very old Yorkshire family, and had passed his life as a soldier in the service of the Hon. East India Company. He had an only sister, who against the wishes and will of her family married Gregory Heinault Harley, the representative of an equally good Yorkshire family, who boasted that they were settled in the county in the Saxon times, and opposed the landing of the Conqueror, but subsequently made their peace with him, and rendering him fealty, received grants of large estates. Between the Harleys and the Pantons, however, there had for many years existed a family feud, the result of a property dispute, which had long occupied the attention of Chancery, and had been the means of pouring into the coffers of the

ghoulish lawyers thousands and thousands of pounds. But deadly as the enmity was between certain members of the two families, it did not prevent Gregory Harley and Blanche Panton from falling desperately in love with each other, and marrying in spite of all the efforts of their friends to frustrate their desire. Young Harley had been brought up to the profession of arms, and was gazetted to a captaincy soon after his marriage. Six months later he was ordered abroad with his regiment to take part in the terrible Crimean campaign. He was one of the very earliest victims of that great war, and his young widow, broken-hearted and crushed with grief, bore him a posthumous daughter; but the shock to her constitution by the news of her husband's death prevented her rallying from the trying ordeal, and she joined her husband in that realm—

"Where beyond these voices there is peace."

The infant daughter, through her parents, was heiress to a very large fortune, and subsequently she was made a ward in Chancery and placed under the care of her uncle. She had been educated with every care, and brought up in a style commensurate with her social position, but in spite of all the vigilance exercised, she had fallen in love with her cousin Jasper Harley, a young fellow some four years her senior. The love-making was carried on clandestinely for a long time, but at length it came to the ears of General Panton, and from what I gathered there is little doubt he took very high-handed proceedings indeed; and the bitter feelings he entertained for the Harleys caused him, I think, to forget that he was a "soldier and a gentleman." But as love laughs at locksmiths, so it is cap-

able of defying furious uncles and stern Courts of Chancery. At any rate, in this particular case both young Harley and Miss Panton seem to have made up their minds that they would not be separated, come what might; and, of course, if the young lady had waited until she came of age, she could have done as she liked. But youth is impatient and love blind, so Jasper Harley and Blanche Panton found some means of keeping up communication, and the affair culminated in the flight of Blanche.

Such was the sum and substance of this tale of chequered love which I learned from the gruff and grim old soldier, whose feeling against Jasper found expression in language that was something more than peppery. The General had a town house, and a box down in Yorkshire, but he only occupied the latter during the shooting season, and the greater part of his time was spent in London. His house was situated in Mayfair, where he kept up a pretty expensive bachelor establishment, and, being fond of company and dining, he entertained a good deal.

The Harleys lived in Yorkshire, their place being known as Castle Moorland. It had been in the occupation of the family for generations, although, as things go nowadays, they were considered poor. At any rate, the General referred to them as "these beggarly wretches who starve themselves in order to keep up an appearance." Of course I could not fail to see how very embittered the General was, and I ventured to hint as delicately as I could that as the young couple were related, and obviously desperately in love with each other, it might not be a bad thing to look leniently on the young man's offence, and ultimately allow them to find in possession of each other the happiness they

sighed for. But this suggestion made the fiery old martinet furious. He banged the table with his fist, stamped his foot, and exclaimed in stentorian tones—

"Look here, Mr. Donovan, I came to you because I understood you are a crack-hand at tracing people; but, demme! I—I won't be dictated to, and if your sympathies are with this rascal and my ungrateful niece, I'll precious soon find somebody who'll take a different view."

"As the young lady and gentleman are utter strangers to me," I remarked, "I can have no interest one way or the other, and as you seek my professional services I am perfectly willing to place them at your disposal. But serious as Mr. Harley's offence is, in running away with a ward in Chancery, I do think some allowance should be made for his youth and for the young lady's feelings."

"I tell you, sir, he is an unmitigated rascal, and she is an ingrate, and I'll make no allowance whatever for their feelings. As for love between them—pooh, bosh, humbug! There's no such thing. It is a stupid, mad infatuation on her part. He has crammed her head with all sorts of rubbish until he has quite turned her brain; and all he thinks of is her money. It's her fortune that he's got his eye on, and since he's been warned over and over again I'll show him no mercy. Not a scrap. I'll have the law on him to its fullest extent."

I had to admit to myself the possibility that as the young lady was heiress to a very large fortune, it was that which had prompted the young man to commit so serious an offence as the carrying off a Chancery ward, so I told the General that I would set to work at once and do my best to trace them. On this under-

standing he took himself off seething with smouldering fire and fury, and I certainly felt that young Harley had little to hope for from his stony-hearted relative.

By this time my interest was aroused; it was a romantic case, and I thought that, whatever happened now, it was safe to predict that if the young people really loved each other they would ultimately come together again for good and aye. But I was not indifferent to the possibility of the young man, after all, being only a vulgar fortune-hunter; such people were not uncommon.

I found on inquiry that on the previous night the General had had a dinner-party, and he and his friends played whist until the early hours of the morning. The consequence was he did not rise till very late, but Miss Harley was up unusually early, and told her maid that as she had a headache, and the morning was so very fine, she was going to walk in the park. According to the maid's statement, she was profoundly astonished at such an unusual proceeding on her young mistress's part, and offered to accompany her, but Blanche insisted on going alone. Nearly three hours had passed, and as the young lady had not returned, Judson, the maid, got very anxious, and as soon as the General came downstairs she mentioned the circumstance to him. He immediately jumped to the conclusion that his niece had eloped with her lover, and, only waiting to swallow a cup of coffee, he drove down to my office. As six hours had passed when I reached the house from the time the young lady had gone out, and as she had not come back, it was clear something had happened. But the General would not for a moment listen to the suggested possibility of an accident. He declared he would stake all he had in the world on it that she had

gone off with her cousin. Circumstances certainly did point to that being the case, and particularly when we learnt that Miss Harley had carried off the greater part of her jewellery with her.

Now it occurred to me that though Judson was very plausible and seemed greatly distressed, she was not quite so ignorant of the reason which had taken her mistress out as she pretended to be. I therefore requested her to grant me a private interview.

"Probably you are aware," I began, "that some love-making had taken place between Miss Blanche and her cousin?"

"I have heard of it," she answered curtly.

"How did you hear of it?"

"Well, Miss Harley herself told me about it."

"And what is your opinion with reference to the feeling she entertained for her cousin? Do you think she loved him?"

"Oh, yes, I'm sure she does."

"She has always given you that impression?"

"Yes. And I am sure he was the dream of her life."

"And what about his feelings for her?"

"He is just as much in love with her as she is with him."

"How do you know?"

"Because I have seen his letters, and they are the most delightful love-letters a man could possibly write."

"Then you don't think it's merely the young lady's fortune he is aiming at?"

"Indeed I do not. I don't think he cares one rap whether she has a fortune or not."

"How was it you came to see his letters?"

"Because she showed them to me."

"Oh, I see. You were in her confidence?"

"Certainly."

"How did her lover manage to send letters to her without her uncle knowing it?"

This question seemed to throw Miss Judson into a state of considerable confusion, and she was evidently at a loss how to answer. But at last she blurted out—

"I don't know."

"Miss Judson," I remarked a little sternly, as I fixed my eyes on her, "is that a strictly accurate answer to my question?"

"What do you mean?" she demanded angrily, and growing very red in the face.

"I thought my meaning was clear. Are you quite sure you don't know how Miss Harley managed to keep up a correspondence with her lover in spite of the vigilance exercised over her?"

Judson's anger seemed to increase, and she stammered out—

"How dare you accuse me of telling a falsehood?"

"Well," I said, with a laugh, "I have scarcely accused you as yet. I have simply hinted as mildly as I could that you were speaking with a reservation. But now, Judson, I am going to be a little more blunt. It is my deliberate opinion that as Miss Harley was in the habit of showing you her love-letters, it is highly probably you knew how she received them."

"This is shameful!" exclaimed Judson fretfully, and flashing an angry, indignant look at me.

"I am going further than that," I said, "and I again express my deliberate opinion that you were perfectly well aware when your mistress went out that she was going off with her cousin, and you know quite well where she has gone to."

"It is a downright shame that you should say such a thing!" she exclaimed, as she burst into tears and smothered her face in her handkerchief. Then, after a spell of weeping, she added—"I'll not stay here another moment to be insulted in such a manner." She was going towards the door when I stopped her by remarking, with a certain force and emphasis on my words—

"Stay a little, Miss Judson. I haven't quite done yet." She turned towards me. Her face was red and her eyes wet. She had really managed to squeeze out some tears.

"Then if you have anything to say, get it said quickly," she remarked, looking very much as if she would like to strangle me.

"You are aware," I went on, "that Miss Harley is a ward in Chancery?"

"Of course I am," was her angry rejoinder.

"But perhaps you are not aware of the severe penalties you incur by aiding and abetting the lady in defying the law and her lawful guardian."

This told as I intended it should. She winced, and I saw an expression in her face which indicated plainly enough that I had frightened her. I followed up the effect I had produced by adding, in a tone that might have been assumed by a judge in sentencing a prisoner to death—

"Now, Judson, this is a very serious business—very serious indeed; but there is yet a chance for you to save yourself from any disagreeable consequences by informing me where the young lady and her lover have gone to."

For a few brief moments she hesitated, and then, with a real gush of tears this time, she jerked out—

"They—they've gone to—to his mother's at Castle Moorland."

I think I smiled, inwardly at any rate, as I recognized my little triumph; and rising, I said with professional gravity—

"You have done well, Judson, to give me this information, for, as you know perfectly well, the law cannot be defied with impunity."

A few hours later I was on my way to Yorkshire, but could not reach Castle Moorland that night, as it was situated in an out-of-the-way district, and some distance from the station. I drove over the next morning, however, arriving there soon after breakfast time. The house was a perfect realization of Tennyson's "Moated Grange." It was hoary with age, and there was a suggestiveness of haunted rooms about it that was delightful. I was challenged at the lodge, and I answered that I had important business with Mrs. Harley. I made my way along an avenue of limes, and as I neared the house I noticed a young man smoking a cigarette as he stood in front of the main entrance. From the description I had received I recognized him at once as Jasper Harley. He was a singularly handsome young man, with a patrician face and a well-knit muscular figure. As I approached him he eyed me keenly, and moved on one side to allow me to pass. But I stopped, and raising my hat said—

"Mr. Jasper Harley, I presume?"

He seemed a little taken back, and answered sharply—

"Yes, that is my name. What do you want?"

The question was asked with a nervous peremptoriness which clearly betrayed that he intuitively guessed my business.

"You have been guilty of a most serious offence," I said, "in abducting a ward in Chancery, and you will please to consider yourself under arrest."

I came to the point at once, for I saw that there was nothing to be gained by beating about the bush. At my words the colour fled from his face, and he flung away the half-consumed cigarette.

"My offence is justified," he said quickly, "morally at any rate, for Miss Harley's uncle and guardian renders her life unsupportable."

"Then the lady should appeal to the Court for relief. But you speak no doubt with a certain prejudice which I can quite understand. Though even if you are correct, your offence is not justified. You will recognize, of course, that further defiance of the law will be absolutely useless, and that the young lady will have to return to her guardian, even though she should have become your wife.

"She is not yet my wife, I am sorry to say," he said, in very obvious distress; "but had you delayed your visit for a few days longer she would have been."

"I presume she is here in the house?"

"She is under the care of my mother."

"Then perhaps you will ask the young lady and your mother to see me."

"Yes," he answered sadly. "Will you follow me?"

He led the way into the spacious entrance hall, the wainscotting of which was hung with many a trophy of the chase, while the floor was covered with rich skins, and against the wall on one side was a magnificent old black oak cabinet, filled with specimens of curious china. He opened a side door and ushered me into an anteroom, richly furnished. Then he was about to withdraw, but I said—

"Stay, sir, I put you on your parole of honour as a gentleman that you will not leave the house, and that you will bring your mother and Miss Harley here."

He drew himself up proudly. There was a look of noble pride in his handsome face as he answered—

"I am a gentleman. I pledge my honour." There was, too, an indescribable dignity in his manner of saying this, and I felt perfectly convinced he was utterly incapable of doing anything that would bear the interpretation of meanness, so I bowed and answered—"Good; I will wait here."

He retired, and in about a quarter of an hour the door once more opened, and there entered an elderly lady and a young one. They were Mrs. Harley and Miss Harley. The elder lady was tall, graceful, and dignified. Her hair was silver-grey, her face sweet and womanly. But it was the young lady who attracted my particular attention. Seldom indeed have I looked upon a more beautiful girl. She had a quantity of golden-brown hair, loosely twined about a splendidly-shaped head, and her eyes had the softness, the pensiveness, the wistfulness of a gazelle. She was leaning on the arm of her protectress, and every movement of her body seemed to be the very poetry of motion. But she was sorrowful. Her fair, sweet face was clouded, and she looked at me with an expression of fear in her eyes.

"I understand," said Mrs. Harley, "that you have come here with reference to the disappearance of this dear child from her uncle's roof?"

"That is so, madam," I answered.

"It is an unfortunate business," she went on, still standing, with Blanche leaning on her arm, although I asked them to be seated, "and I am sorry that my son has been so precipitate and rash. But the fact is,

my niece here is most unhappy under her uncle's guardianship."

"Then she should apply to the Court for relief from him," I suggested.

Mrs. Harley smiled ironically as she answered—

"Appeal to the Court, indeed! What use would that be I should like to know? It would at once be said that all wards are more or less dissatisfied with their guardians. In this instance General Panton does nothing that the Court would consider a breach of his trust. But he makes the poor child's life unbearable by petty persecutions and a severity of control which reduces her almost to the position of a bond-slave. Moreover, he is desirous that she should, when she comes of age, marry a young man whom she detests."

At these words I noticed that Blanche shuddered, and into her beautiful face came a look of infinite contempt; and at this moment, as if it had been dramatically arranged, though, of course, that was not the case, the door opened again and Jasper Harley entered. His mother waved her white jewelled hand toward him, and said—"Her love lies there, and I am sure that nothing in the world will induce her to love any one else."

"Nothing, nothing," murmured Blanche, looking at her lover with a look of infinite tenderness.

"However," pursued the lady, "I am not going into family matters beyond saying that the General is strongly prejudiced against us all, and will resort to any means to prevent Blanche becoming my son's wife. In the meantime she, being an infant in the eyes of the law, must obey the law. Therefore you will perhaps inform me, sir, what course you will take?"

"It is my duty, madam, to convey the young lady back to her lawful guardian," I remarked.

"Oh, aunt," exclaimed Blanche, in a paroxysm of alarm, and clinging closely to the lady, "protect me! I won't go back. I shall die if I do, or go mad. Do, please, keep me with you. I am so very, very unhappy with my uncle."

Jasper now interposed. He stepped forward, and taking both her hands in his, said sorrowfully—

"I am afraid, dear, there is no help for it. The powers arrayed against us will prove too strong to be resisted. We must suffer and endure for yet a little while longer."

Her beautiful, languid eyes filled with tears as she answered pathetically—

"If you say I must go, Jasper, I will go. But I cannot stand my uncle's rule much longer."

Jasper was greatly distressed.

"What are we to do?" he murmured. "In persuading you to come to my mother's house I recognize that I have broken the law. As I say, we are powerless, conquered for the time; but the final triumph will yet be ours."

She sighed deeply, and, withdrawing her hands, said—

"You will it; let it so be." Then, turning to me, she asked, "When must I go, sir?"

"As soon as possible," I answered.

"Can my aunt and cousin accompany me to London?"

"Yes," I replied. "But you must please to consider yourself under my care, and you must promise me that you will make no attempt to elude me."

"I will answer for her," exclaimed Jasper proudly. I bowed and felt relieved from any further anxiety, for no one could look into Jasper Harley's face without being assured that his pledged word was his bond. The two

ladies retired from the room to prepare themselves for the journey, as it was decided we should leave by the two o'clock train. When we were alone Jasper turned to me and remarked—

"This is a sad business, sir. You, as a stranger, cannot of course understand how it affects us. My uncle is one of the most determined and obstinate men who ever lived. There is a feud between my branch of the family and his, and while he lives that feud will never end."

"You have my sympathy," I replied, "but I take it that in another year or so Miss Harley will be free to do as she likes."

"In another year or so!" he exclaimed, with a cynical laugh. "Heaven knows what may happen in that time." He sighed deeply, and I noticed that his eyes were dim, and turning away he walked to the long French window and gazed pensively over the lawn.

I was invited to luncheon, and the meal over, we all drove to the station. That night I restored Miss Harley to her uncle's care. Never shall I forget the pathetic and touching scene when she parted from her lover.

Six months later London was treated to one of those nine days' sensations which the Great Babylon so much enjoys. It burst upon the city by means of a paragraph in the papers headed, "Mysterious Death of a Young Lady in the West End," and it went on to say that the niece and ward of General Panton had been found dead in bed with every evidence about her that she had died of poison.

Later, fuller particulars were forthcoming, and these informed the public that Miss Blanche Harley, an

orphan young lady and a ward in Chancery, had died in a very mysterious way from—as it was believed—an overdose of morphia. Miss Harley bore the reputation of being one of the most beautiful women in London, and being heiress to a large fortune she had everything in the world that could conduce to her happiness.

What mockery this seemed to me who had been behind the scenes! I recalled the parting between her and her lover on the night that I took her back to her uncle's house, and once again I saw her sweet face filled with an expression of ineffable sadness.

The coroner's inquest, which was inevitable—although the General took every means possible to avoid it—revealed beyond doubt that Miss Blanche Harley had purposely destroyed her life by taking a large dose of morphia, though how she procured the poison was destined to remain for ever a mystery. And thus the verdict ran that "Blanche Harley had destroyed her own life by swallowing morphia during a fit of temporary insanity."

So the curtain fell upon the little tragic drama as far as the public were concerned, and the giddy throng went on their way, hoping for another sensation soon; while the remains of beautiful Blanche Harley were consigned to the earth, and one who followed her was racked with inconsolable grief that told too surely his heart was broken.

And now the sequel. Not a year had passed from that mournful day when Jasper Harley had stood at the grave side of his beloved when we were engaged in a little frontier war in India. Restless and lonely, Jasper had gone to India, and when the war broke out he volunteered for service. He saw the chance now to fling his life away—a life that had ceased to charm

since all its flowers were withered, its light darkened for ever. In a wild northern valley he fell. Single handed he charged a troop of hill savages, who were preparing to swoop down on the devoted little band of which he was one. He aroused his comrades to a knowledge of their danger, and saved them from being cut to pieces; but for himself he found that peace which up to then he had vainly sought.

In the quiet Yorkshire church of Moorlands his bereaved mother placed that beautiful monument which suggests so pathetically that the devoted lovers so cruelly separated on earth will meet in the brighter and better world "At the Dawn of Day."

THE GREAT DIAMOND FRAUDS.

The rising generation will scarcely remember the extraordinary case I am about to relate; but those who, like myself, stand almost on the verge of the great unknown, will recall the sensation that was produced by the disclosure of a series of frauds that beyond doubt rank amongst the most remarkable of the century. In a certain sense they were unique, and were stamped with an originality of conception worthy of being applied to a better cause.

It was soon after the grand and imposing inaugural ceremony which marked the opening of the marvellous Exhibition of 1851, on that memorable 1st of May, when our Queen, then a young and radiant woman, and her well-loved consort, who had worked so hard for the success of the undertaking, were received with a thunder of applause by tens of thousands of their loyal subjects. It seems to me, viewing that pageant now through the mist of forty odd years, that nothing in this country since then has equalled it, not even the magnificence of the Jubilee celebration. It was a day of days, and for once our fickle climate redeemed its character. The sun rose in splendour, and throughout the ceremony poured forth his unchecked beams, that, flooding every nook and cranny of the immense crystal structure which had grown up almost like Aladdin's palace, gave the finishing touches of perfect beauty to an achievement of which all men might well feel proud. For human hands and human brains had produced a

triumph of art and skill, that tended to knit the world in closer bonds, and which brought to our hospitable shores representatives of every corner of the globe.

I had just returned from Paris, where I had been for some time studying the methods of the reconstituted French detective service. Those were exciting times in Paris, for it might be said it was the dawning of the new Napoleonic era, when the adventurer of 1840, who, with a handful of needy followers at his back, had landed clandestinely at Boulogne, was to assume the Imperial sceptre and give to France eighteen years of peace and splendour until his sun set on the gory field of Sedan, and, broken-hearted, he was to become an exile in the country which had afforded him shelter in his youth. During my stay in the French capital I had come in contact with a great many eminent people, not a few of whom were destined to write their names large on the indelible pages of history. Amongst these people was Count Weberstein, then a young and handsome man, studying for the diplomatic service, and who afterwards became the Austrian ambassador at the Court of France. The Count was young and foolish, and, like many another young man, he allowed his passion to run away with his common sense, with the result that he entangled himself with a very pretty but very heartless French actress, who had turned the heads of half the Parisian youths. She was professionally known as Mdlle. Thérèse Fontaine, and her extravagance was such that it would have ruined Crœsus himself. She was said to be one of the most beautiful women in France, but if ever beauty of human form concealed a devil of the nether world it did so in her case. As the alliance soon became more than irksome to the Count, he broke it off, returned to

his own country, and for a time I lost sight of him.

On that brilliant May day which saw the inauguration of the great International Exhibition, I was standing in the centre transept, near the fountain, soon after the Queen had declared the building open, when a liveried servant elbowed his way towards me, and inquired if my name was Donovan. On receiving an answer in the affirmative, he thrust a sealed letter into my hand and disappeared before I could put a single question to him. My first impulse was to follow him, but the crowd was so great that even if I had obeyed the impulse, it is doubtful if I could have discovered him. So I glanced at the envelope. It bore my name only, and the name was written in an unmistakably foreign hand. I opened the envelope, took out the note it contained, and read the following lines, written in French, and with a black-lead pencil :—

"The Count Weberstein presents his compliments to Mr. Donovan, and begs that he will do him the favour of calling upon him as soon as it may be convenient for him to do so. It would suit the Count best if Mr. Donovan would make the hour between 10 and 11 in the morning. Will Mr. Donovan also oblige by treating this letter as strictly private and confidential?"

The address given was a house in Park Lane, near the Piccadilly end.

Naturally I was surprised to receive a note from the Count, conveyed to me in such a mysterious manner; and naturally also I was curious to know what it was he wanted with me. My acquaintance with him in Paris had only been of a passing kind. He was a man

about town, and I was introduced to him one night at the Jardin Mabile by the renowned French detective, Charles Guillemot. Subsequently I met him on divers occasions and in divers places, and he was always condescending and affable. When he left Paris he passed out of my mind, and I doubt if I had even the faintest expectation of ever meeting him again; so that my surprise at being placed so suddenly in possession of a communication from him, on that day of all days, may be more easily imagined than described.

I did not find an opportunity to comply with his request until three days later. The house he was temporarily occupying was a very grand one, and bore all the outward evidence of being the home of wealth and luxury. My card at once gained me admission to the Count's presence. He received me in an elegantly furnished room, which was adorned with costly art treasures that had evidently been arranged with the most refined taste and care.

Dismissing his secretary, with whom he was engaged when I entered, the Count rose and cordially shook me by the hand.

"To meet you again so unexpectedly is an unlooked-for pleasure," I remarked, as I recalled his unvarying courtesy and kindness to me during the time I was in Paris. As he had not a perfect command of the English language, but spoke French like a native, I addressed him in French, and he answered me in the same tongue.

"It is very good of you to come," he said, laying both his hands on my shoulders in foreign fashion, when one is disposed to be familiar and confidential. "I saw you in the Exhibition on the day of the opening, and it struck me that you would aid me, so I

hastily scribbled the note and sent it to you by my valet. But pray be seated." He pointed to a most luxurious chair, and offered me his elegant silver cigarette-case. Having seated myself and lighted a cigarette, I said—

"Tell me, Count, if you please, am I to regard this as a business interview?"

"Certainment, mon ami!" he exclaimed, with a pleasant smile which seemed to rob his next sentence of weight—"and very serious business too."

I smiled in response, for there was absolutely nothing in his manner or address that suggested seriousness.

"Ah, my friend, pray don't smile at me," he remarked, suddenly assuming a lugubrious expression that was absolutely comical. "I am going to take you into my confidence. I am going to ask you to assist me."

"Pray command me," I said. "I am all attention," and leaning back in my chair, I puffed smoke-rings into the air and composed myself to listen to his recital.

"You are aware that I am married?" he began.

"No, I did not know that. But permit me to offer you my congratulations, Count."

"Merci, mille merci. I have been married four months, only—four months, mark you, Donovan—and yet the Countess and I are at daggers drawn at present."

"Indeed. That is very sad!"

"Yes, alas, yes! But whatever quarrel there is, if quarrel it is, is on her side."

"But, surely Count, some provocation or——"

"Pardon!" he exclaimed, interrupting my remark. "In a sense, yes; in another sense, no; I gave provocation, but not intentionally. The Countess is as proud and unforgiving as she is beautiful and in a general way amiable. She is a member of a noble

Austrian family who have ever been noted for their unbending pride. But to my trouble. It is this. I have been in London for some time engaged in diplomatic business in connection with the Austrian Embassy. On the eve of my leaving London to bring home my bride, a gentleman called upon me. He was an Italian, and gave his name as Carlo Cellucino. He brought a letter of introduction from my friend Monsieur Eugène St.-Joseph, the French Consul at Genoa, of which place he said he was a native. He represented himself as belonging to an exceedingly good family, but had ruined himself by gambling. The last bit of property he possessed was a set of magnificent diamonds. They were family heirlooms, and had come to him through his mother, and he had presented them to his wife. But she was dead, and wishing to raise money, and learning that I was about to wed, he came to offer to sell the diamonds to me in preference to disposing of them through the ordinary channels of sale for such things. He had the diamonds with him in an elegant velvet-lined case, and I was greatly struck with their beauty and brilliancy. The price he asked was twenty-five thousand pounds. A large sum, but still under the circumstances of my marriage with a wealthy lady, and as I had recently succeeded to a snug little fortune, I thought it was not an extravagant expenditure to incur in making a present to my bride. So I told him that if he liked to leave the stones with me for three days I would have them examined and reported upon by an expert, and if that report was favourable and the price he asked represented their value, I would purchase them.

"He expressed himself as entirely satisfied with that arrangement, and asked me to give him a written

agreement to that effect, which I did; and when an appointment had been made for the morning of the third day from that one, he took his leave.

"In the course of the afternoon I drove to Goldschmidt and Glückstein's, the renowned dealers in precious stones, taking the diamonds with me, and I asked them to value and examine them. This they did very carefully in my presence, with the result that they pronounced the gems as being perfect of their kind; but they thought twenty thousand pounds represented their full value, and strongly advised me not to pay more. True to the appointment, Carlo Cellucino came to my house on the third morning, and I told him what I had been advised was the true value of the gems, and if he chose to accept twenty thousand pounds I would purchase them. He seemed greatly disappointed, and asked me if I would increase the price by three thousand, but I declined to do that, whereupon he said that he regretted he could not accept my offer. So I gave him the case of jewels, which he received regretfully; and, having examined them, he handed me back the agreement he held, and, bidding me good morning, went as far as the door. Then suddenly returning and placing the case on the table before me, he said—

"'Count, I cannot resist your offer. Poverty drives me to accept it. Pray give me the money, and the diamonds are yours.' As I had nothing like that sum at my London bankers at the time, I told him I would remit him the money within a week from Austria by a draft payable at sight; but he said that he must have the money at once as he was going abroad himself, so I gave him an order on my agents here in the city, and asked them to pay him the cash on presentation of the order, and I sent my secretary to

them with a private letter so that there should be no hitch. Within three hours Cellucino had received the money. Now comes the sequel, and I am sure it will astonish you."

"Nothing in this world would astonish me, Count, in the way of roguery," I remarked, as I accepted another of his cigarettes and lighted it.

"Ah, but you don't know," he remarked sadly. "This business is without a parallel. I duly presented the jewels to my bride——"

"The supposed jewels," I said.

"What supposed jewels?"

"The imitations."

"How did you know that?" he demanded sharply.

"My dear Count, the whole business is as clear as plate-glass to me," I answered. "When the clever Carlo Cellucino took the case from you and walked to the door on your telling him that you would only pay twenty thousand pounds, he produced another case identical in appearance, but containing imitation stones."

"By heaven, Donovan, you are right!" the Count exclaimed, a little excitedly.

"Of course I am. The whole business was, as we say, a plant. Cellucino is evidently an accomplished swindler. He asked you twenty-five thousand pounds for the real stones in the first instance, knowing very well that you would be advised not to pay so much. His assumed disappointment, his refusal to accept your offer, and then the sudden changing of his mind, were the means he employed to throw you off your guard and disarm suspicion. Is that so, or is it not?"

"Yes, yes, no doubt it was so. Well, but now listen to what follows. I gave the jewels to my wife as

a marriage present, and she was mightily pleased with them. Neither she nor I suspected for a single instant that I had been sold, and we might have remained in ignorance for a long time. It was pitiable ignorance, no doubt, but we are not all experts, you know. However, soon after we came back to London, the Countess was presented at Court by her great friend the Duchess of Medway. My wife wore these wretched imitation diamonds, which seem to have particularly attracted the notice of the Duchess, who, after the presentation, asked my wife why she had worn imitation stones. The Countess, as may be imagined, was much irritated, for her pride was wounded to the quick. She was stung as she had never before been stung in her life. She came home furious, and accused me of having deceived her in the matter. I was thunderstruck, and, of course, protested; and though I told her that I myself had been deceived, she would not believe it; and, of course, I could give her no proof. I took the wretched things to Goldschmidt and Glückstein's, and they immediately said that the stones were not those they had valued for me; and that while the imitations were very good of their kind, and calculated to deceive an unpractised eye, they were not worth more than a few hundred pounds. That is the whole story. Now, what I want you to do is this. Bring the rascal Cellucino to book, so that my wife may know that I did not wilfully deceive her in this affair. Of course if we had discovered the fraud ourselves it would not have mattered so much; but what rankles with the Countess so deeply is the fact of her friend the Duchess having accused her of wearing false diamonds at the Drawing Room. Do you see? The family pride and the womanly vanity were wounded at one blow."

It certainly was a strange story, and it made it obvious that the Italian adventurer Cellucino—not that I believed Cellucino was his real name—was a consummate master in the art of swindling.

Having obtained all the particulars I could from the Count, and a description of Cellucino, I set to work to try and get on his track. The first thing I did was to telegraph to Monsieur St.-Joseph, the French Consul at Genoa, asking if he knew any one by the name of Cellucino. As I suspected, the answer was, "No; never heard of such a person." Unfortunately, the letter of introduction the fellow had presented to the Count had been destroyed, but at the time of reading it the Count saw nothing in the handwriting that would lead him to suppose it was a forgery. But from the fact that Cellucino was able to imitate Monsieur St.-Joseph's writing, it was pretty clear he must have known something about him, and I felt that that in itself was likely to afford me a clue. The fact of Cellucino being in possession of real diamonds valued at twenty thousand pounds showed that he was no ordinary swindler. Those diamonds were his capital and stock-in-trade, without which, of course, he could not work. And that he was to some extent an accomplished rascal was evident, because a vulgar and ignorant man would hardly have dared to have flown at such high game as Count Weberstein. For cleverness of conception and the artful carrying out of all the details which were so important to success, the case was conspicuously original. And a man who had done so well was not likely to pause, for he had the means in his hands of rapidly reaping a fortune; nor was it likely that he would miss the chance. He would grow bolder by his success.

One very important point to determine at the onset

was how did Cellucino become possessed of the real stones. Had he stolen them? If so, the circumstances of the robbery might afford me a clue. All my inquiries, however, failed to elicit any information of a robbery of a set of diamonds of that kind. This was a little puzzling, but I inferred from it that the fellow was working in partnership with some one, and that the decoy nest-egg had been legitimately purchased in the first instance. While I was still searching for a trail that would lead me to the rascal's retreat, Count Weberstein received an inquiry from a lady then residing in Edinburgh, and with whom he had some slight acquaintance, asking him if he knew one Cellucino. The letter explained that this man had come to her with a letter of introduction from the Count, and he told her the same story as he had told the Count, and played the same trick upon her. But in this instance he only offered her diamond earrings and a diamond pendant, valued at three thousand pounds; and when he had rung the changes successfully, the lady found herself in possession of stones worth a few pounds only. In her case, as we subsequently learnt, as in the Count's, the fraud was discovered by chance. She broke the pendant and took it to a jeweller to be repaired, and by him she was informed that the stones were only imitations. She had preserved the letter of introduction, which I secured, and on comparing it with the Count's handwriting it proved to be an almost perfect facsimile. It will be remembered that the Count had given Cellucino a written acknowledgment of having received the diamonds pending the examination by an expert, and could there be any doubt about that letter having afforded the clever cheat the model he required in order to imitate it?

The fraud had now assumed large proportions, and I felt it necessary to insert a letter in all the leading London papers, cautioning the public against the accomplished rascal, who so successfully acted his part, and bled his dupes with such professional coolness. His boldness had so far served him well, but that very boldness, I was disposed to think, would ultimately give him into my hands.

As I had formed a strong opinion in my own mind that Cellucino might have been connected at some time or other with the French Consulate at Genoa, I set off for that city and had an interview with Monsieur St.-Joseph. The interview did not seem to promise much. Monsieur St.-Joseph knew no one who in the least degree answered to the description of Cellucino, and he was puzzled very much to understand how his name and handwriting could have been used as an aid to the perpetration of the fraud.

"There can be no doubt, sir," I said, "that this fellow must have known you, or something about you. Otherwise, how came it that he used your name. Have you dismissed any of your *employés* of late?"

"No." Then after a moment's pause he exclaimed, "Stay. Now I remember. About twelve months ago I dismissed my secretary, as we did not get on very well together."

"What was his name?"

"Henri Rosseau, a native of Paris."

"Can you describe him?"

"I can show you his likeness. We keep likenesses of every one connected with the Consul's office." Here he produced a box, and, opening it, he showed me the photograph on glass, in the old style, of a very handsome young man of about eight-and-twenty. I

examined it very critically for some minutes. Then said—

"Monsieur St.-Joseph, I must ask you to let me take this photograph away for a time."

"Why?" he asked, with an expression of surprise.

"Because it may be of use."

"But surely you don't suspect that man?"

"Pardon me, Monsieur, if I decline at this stage to commit myself to any statement. Justice may be served, however, by your complying with my request."

He shrugged his shoulders, blew a cloud of smoke from his cigarette, and remarked—

"As you will. You detectives are curious fellows. No one, I declare, is safe from your suspicions."

I smiled, took the photograph, thanked him for his courtesy, and withdrew, feeling that I had got a clue at last. The reader may naturally ask, "Where was the clue?" The answer is easily given. From the minute and detailed description I had of Carlo Cellucino I had mentally photographed him, and in this likeness of Henri Rosseau I thought I detected a strong resemblance—a family likeness, in fact—which led me to infer that he and Cellucino might be closely related. And my opinion was that if I could discover Rosseau, I might possibly get on the track of Cellucino.

Three days spent in Genoa enabled me to learn something of the habits of Rosseau during the time he had lived there. It was his custom to nightly visit the Café Conradi, where he always took his supper. It would appear that he was much given to gambling, and lost sums of money far beyond his ability to pay. On leaving Genoa he was indebted to the proprietor of the *café* in a sum exceeding a thousand francs. He

promised to remit this amount from Paris, but it was never sent, though Rosseau wrote from Paris two or three times to excuse himself. Then his correspondence ceased, and he could be heard of no more.

To Paris I accordingly went, and called at the last address given by Rosseau to the proprietor of the Genoa *café*. He had lived in apartments there, and I was told he had been gone away about eight months, and it was believed he had married an actress of the Châtelet. Inquiries pushed at this theatre revealed to me that the actress who had become Madame Henri Rosseau was none other than the beautiful but heartless Mdlle. Thérèse Fontaine—"La Belle Fontaine," as the gilded youth of Paris had fondly called her. This news was instructive. La Belle Fontaine was the young lady who had beguiled Count Weberstein, and I began to think that the scent was getting warm. A little later I ascertained that the last heard of Rosseau and his wife was that they had gone to London. My next move, therefore, was to London also, and I immediately wrote to Count Weberstein asking him to appoint an interview as soon as possible. He named the hour of eleven at his residence in Park Lane, and when he had greeted me he inquired if I had met with any success.

"Before answering you, Count," I said, "will you answer me a question or two?"

"Certainly, if it will help you in any way."

"It will help me. First, then, do you know if La Belle Fontaine is married?"

There was a certain anxiousness in his expression, as he looked inquiringly at me and answered—

"No. Why do you ask?"

Ignoring his question, I continued—

"Have you ever seen her or heard from her since you left Paris?"

He hesitated and appeared confused, but at last answered me.

"After I came to London she wrote several letters to me asking for money."

"And you sent her money?"

"I did. Soon after my engagement was announced she again wrote demanding a large sum, and gave an address near Leicester Square where the money was to be sent to."

"Did you send it?"

"No."

"What followed then?"

"She again wrote, threatening to ruin me if I did not comply with her demand."

"Well?"

"As I was anxious to avoid any scandal on the eve of my marriage, I called upon her."

"And you saw her?"

"I did. And presumably she construed my act as due to fear, so she doubled her demands."

"Did you comply with them?"

"Oh dear, no! I felt that I had been weak in going to her; but I offered her about an eighth of what she wanted if she would sign a paper undertaking not to annoy me any more. This she declined to do, so I declined to give her any money and made up my mind to defy her."

"You quarrelled, then?"

"Well, we parted in anger."

"Have you seen her since?"

"No."

"Nor heard from her?"

"No."

"Did she carry out her threat?"

"Not that I am aware of."

As I accepted another of the Count's excellent cigarettes I rose to take my departure, and, shaking his proffered hand, I said—

"Count, I think I may venture to promise that I shall succeed before long in bringing the man who so cleverly swindled you to account."

"But no re-opening the book of the past," he remarked significantly, and in a nervous and anxious way.

"I will endeavour to keep the book clasped and sealed," I answered, with a reassuring smile.

Of course I did not expect to find Madame Rosseau—La Belle Fontaine—at the address where Count Weberstein had visited her in London; but I did expect to pick up a trace of her. Nor was I mistaken. She had left some time ago, and had been heard to say that she was going to reside in Marseilles with her husband.

A week later found me in Marseilles. It is a big place in which to look for a person unless you have some definite address. But, as most people know, it is far easier in France to find any one you want than it is England. We are rather fond of boasting that we are a free and practical people, but there are some things that we should be none the worse for copying from our neighbours across the Channel. And one of these things is the system of registration in force all over France. By means of this system I speedily learnt that Monsieur and Madame Rosseau rented a superb little villa situated in one of the most beautiful suburbs of Marseilles, and commanding a view of the gulf and

the rocky island which figure so conspicuously in Dumas' immortal story of "The Count of Monte Cristo." Here they lived a life of seeming luxury and ease. La Belle Fontaine struck me as being even more beautiful and a little more devilish than in the old days in Paris; when, syren-like, she had lured Count Weberstein into her toils. Her husband, Monsieur Rosseau, was as handsome as she was beautiful, and just as soulless. He was typically French in dress, in habits, in style. His creed might possibly have been summed up thus: To enjoy life in this world is to live. To live is to minister to the tastes, the passions, the sensual appetites; to indulge the body in every possible way, and when one sensation has palled seek for another.

He dressed in the height of fashion, so did his wife. They kept their horses and carriages; they had numerous servants; their home was luxurious. All this meant a large expenditure, and they had gained the local reputation of being a wealthy and highly-favoured couple. But how was it all done? Where did the money come from? Not from Madame, for as a Parisian actress her extravagance would have ruined half-a-dozen millionaires. Nor from Monsieur, for he had left Genoa without paying his trifling debts. This remarkable couple presented me with a problem, for which I determined to find the solution if it was in the power of mortal man to do so. Need I say that they were kept in profound ignorance of my presence in the sunny city. They had no idea that they were such objects of deep interest to a shadower who shadowed them as if he had been their own shadow. Now let me here state that I did not think Henri Rosseau was the man who had so successfully defrauded Count Weber-

stein. Oh dear, no! But what I did think was, that Henri Rosseau could tell a good deal about that little business if he was disposed to speak on the subject; and through him I expected to get on the track of the interesting Carlo Cellucino, for I had quite made up my mind that there was a connection between the two, and I anticipated that, all unknown to himself, Rosseau would deliver the other man into my hands.

One day Monsieur and Madame Henri Rosseau departed for Paris. It was only a temporary departure, because they left all their belongings behind them. Their journey was probably one of pleasure and business combined. At this time I had for my colleague the clever French detective Auguste Verney, who afterwards became famous, and was subsequently stabbed to death in the hideous Paris quarter known as St. Denis, while trying to effect the capture of the atrocious murderer Jean Valois, whose crimes read like nightmare distortions. I never knew a man off the stage who was capable of so successfully disguising himself as Verney, or of assuming so many *rôles*. Had he chosen the stage for his profession he would have made a rapid fortune. But he was a detective by nature, and nothing could make him take kindly to any other calling. We concerted a little plan together. By a clever ruse he got all the servants out of the house one brilliant afternoon. Then he and I clandestinely entered, and without a moment's loss of time we set to work to search for evidence that would justify my deductions and suspicions. Nor were we long before we found them. In the chief bedroom—that occupied by Monsieur and Madame, which was ravishing in its appointments and upholstering—was a large Louis Quatorze escritoire. Verney was provided with keys

that would open anything in the shape of a lock, and in a few minutes we had that desk opened, and were eagerly, and perhaps a little excitedly, examining bundles of papers and letters; and speedily was it made manifest to us by documentary evidence that Rosseau was a perfect imitator of handwriting. Here were specimens of the handwriting of various high personages, and on slips of paper were facsimiles written by Rosseau. This discovery was of great importance; but of even greater importance was that disclosed by a bundle of correspondence which proved that "Carlo Cellucino" was none other than Rosseau's own brother, and we learnt from recent letters that the arch cheat was at that very time in London, seeking no doubt for fresh victims. Perhaps I and my companion could be pardoned for a feeling of pride and exultation in having thus unearthed a nest of vipers. If Monsieur and Madame Rosseau had only dreamed that that correspondence was to fall into our hands, they would surely have made a bonfire of the whole house rather than allowed the secrets of the escritoire to have betrayed them. But it was only another illustration of the fatuity of criminals, which, if a detective only knows how to take advantage of, serves him well.

That night I started for London, and went through without break of journey, and twelve hours after reaching English soil, Pierre Rosseau—for that was his name—alias "Carlo Cellucino," and any number of other aliases, was my prisoner. I arrested him just as he was about to begin a very luxurious little repast in a West End hotel. When he found that the game was up, he drew a revolver with the intention of shooting either me or himself, or both, it may be; but his action

was not quick enough. I knocked the deadly weapon from his hand, fell upon him, and, with the assistance of two or three waiters, secured him. Amongst his luggage was found the valuable set of decoy diamonds, and a large collection of the imitations. It was subsequently proved that the real stones had been presented to La Belle Fontaine by one of her most ardent admirers, the Old Duke of ——; it is not necessary to mention his name.

During the time that intervened between Rosseau's committal and his trial, the most startling evidence was collected of the extent of his depredations. Many of the aristocratic people whom he had swindled declined to come forward, not wishing to expose their own folly, I suppose. But we proved beyond doubt that he had succeeded in netting a sum of upwards of a hundred thousand pounds. He worked, of course, in connection with his brother and sister-in-law. Henri Rosseau had the faculty of being able to imitate any handwriting, and the letters of introduction emanated from him; while Madame, by her syren wiles, drew forth correspondence from men in high quarters in order that specimens of their handwriting might be obtained. The united cleverness of this precious trio, had it been put to a legitimate use, might have enabled them to have left the world better than they found it. But they chose to prey upon the folly and vanity of mankind, and live as though they thought the sun would never set nor the night come. But the darkness fell upon them very suddenly. Over the jury that tried Rosseau and his wife in France, Madame's beauty prevailed, and she got off with the light sentence of four years' imprisonment. Her husband, however, was put away for life; and so was "Carlo

Cellucino." Consequently each had time to reflect—one in a French and the other in an English prison—that honest poverty is more conductive to happiness and contentment than criminal wealth. I had the satisfaction of being congratulated by Count Weberstein on my success, and of knowing that he and the Countess were quite reconciled.

A WIDOW'S MITE.

The man whose duty it is to bring home crime to evil-doers can scarcely avoid coming to the conclusion at times that there is no such thing as goodness in human nature. This is, of course, the extreme of cynicism, and it is a very sad view to take, but alas! it is almost justified. I say "almost," because sometimes women do deeds of nobleness which serve in a large measure to redeem us from entire condemnation. I particularly refer to women, for I think that they alone understand in its most exalted sense the meaning of unselfishness. It may be said that this is a mere sentiment, but if it is so, peculiar emphasis is given to it in the following story, which, unhappily, is too true.

Mr. John Marshall had gained the reputation of being an upright and honest man. He had been in business in the city of London as a commission agent and broker for something like forty years, and had inspired such confidence that men would have trusted him to almost unlimited extent. He was somewhat easy-going, and not ambitious, otherwise he might have risen to great heights. But he was a *dilettante;* he loved books, he had a sneaking regard for science, and he was something more than a respectable amateur in botany. These tastes, however, do not blend well with the hard, grubbing, musty sort of life a City man of necessity leads. Mr. Marshall experienced this, and he would have preferred to have passed his time over his hobbies; but the City claimed him for its own. He

knew that he could never distinguish himself in literature, never make his mark as a scientific man, nor stand out conspicuously as a light in botany. His inclinations tended that way, but he was conscious of something lacking, and so he devoted himself bravely to his City work, and found the means to gratify his particular tastes in such spare hours as he had at his disposal. By nature he was a gentle, lovable man, and very highly respected; though there is little doubt that by the hard-headed money-spinners of the great hub with whom he came in contact he was considered to be rather wanting in that grit which is essential to him who would get the best of a bargain. In other words, he was not considered to be shrewd enough, nor sharp enough, nor—shall I add the word—unscrupulous enough, to rise to eminence as a City man, who of all other men—so it is contended by those who profess to know—should never indulge in sentiment.

I once heard a very successful and very wealthy City gentleman, who represented with credit a Radical constituency in Parliament, say at a public meeting, in referring to his own successful career—

"If you want to make your way in the City you must be as hard as flint, and as deaf as an adder to all appeals for sympathy."

It was a very human doctrine, but none the less revolting. But that man made his mark. He was a "distinguished citizen." He was in his time presented with illuminated addresses, services of plate, his full-length portrait, and so forth. And his name figured on the board of directors of many a successful company. But he was "as hard as flint," and any man getting the better of him would have been clever

indeed. This eminent citizen died in due course—for we all end in dust, whether we be eminent or not—and a pompous, costly monument in Brompton Cemetery records a long list of his virtues, which, however, existed only in the imagination of the writer of the eulogistic epitaph; but then you see the dead man "cut up," as the vulgar phrasing has it, to the tune of a quarter of a million personalty. That, no doubt, was a virtue in the eyes of his recorder. The doctrine held by this eminent citizen was not one that apparently found favour with Mr. John Marshall. He aimed not at high places amongst City magnates; and in his own unostentatious and unassuming way it is presumable on good grounds that he was by no means as deaf as an adder to appeals for sympathy. His family consisted of, besides his wife, two daughters and a son. The eldest daughter married an army officer, and went with her husband to India, where she fell a victim to the climate. His youngest daughter was unhappily deformed. In her babyhood she fell from a chair and injured her spine. She was as the apple of her father's eye—well, next perhaps to his son Philip. This son received a good education and spent a short time at Oxford, but did not distinguish himself in the ordinary sense. He did distinguish himself, however, by a graceless college career, and was sent into rustication. Then after a year or two of wandering in foreign lands he came home and entered his father's business. But he was in no way a chip of the old block. His ambition was boundless, and had his father listened to him there is no telling what would have been his end; but Mr. Marshall resolutely pursued his steady, plodding way. He found ample compensation for his labours in the City, and in the bosom of his family in his charming house

at Highgate, where in the company of his crippled daughter, amongst his books, his plants, and flowers, and his apology for a laboratory, he passed a sort of idyllic life that was free from the taint of the City. But before the measure of his years was full, a shaft from the quiver of Death suddenly struck him, and he was borne to his rest amidst the lamentations of his widow and daughter. They were comfortably provided for, and to his son he left his business. Up to this point Philip had probably considered himself in chains. But the hour of freedom struck with the passing of his pure-minded father, and he determined to mark it by showing what he could do.

Within a year of his father's death he married a young woman who wished to pose as the "lady" of a City magnate, and Philip aimed at being the City magnate. A town house was taken. There were horses and carriages and swell dinners, and all the outward show of opulence. But in less than two years he was judicially separated from his wife, and in less than three he was in the bankruptcy court, with liabilities set down at eighty thousand pounds and assets at five.

Some five years later, to the banging of the big drum and the blare of trumpet, a "society" was formed by which the working man and the working man's family were to be enormously benefited, and every working man who chose to subscribe his trifle per week was ultimately to have a good home, fine clothes, and various other things which are supposed to be the distinct privilege of the rich. These wonders were to be accomplished through the medium of "The Friend of Labour and Mutual Benefit Society." The prime mover, in which was "The Hon. Lyulph Stanley," and his coadjutors were a Mr. Jacob Oppenheim, and a Mr.

Robert Carr Baintree. Under the ægis of this triumvirate the Society was inaugurated. Flaming advertisements appeared in the papers, paragraphs pointing out the advantage of the wonderful society were freely published, and circulars were sent out broadcast by tens of thousands. The scheme caught on. From all parts of the country came adhesions to it. The working man's weekly pence swelled into pounds, and hundreds of pounds and thousands and tens of thousands of pounds. The Hon. Lyulph Stanley lived in great style in Kensington, and drove down to the Society's chief City office in his brougham. Branch offices were opened in all the principal towns; the rolling ball went on gathering, and the money poured in. A perfect fever of excitement seemed to seize the working classes, who talked of the good time coming. But after a while little whisperings began to be heard. They were like those sudden warm puffs of wind in the tropics which presage the coming tornado. Then the whisperings grew louder, and ugly rumours were floated about. They represented the gathering clouds in the erstwhile blue sky. And at last the deluded working men and their families set up a loud clamour in united chorus for the return of their money. Next a rush was made for the chief City office; but the shutters were up and the triumvirate had made themselves conspicuous by their absence. Cries of "swindle" now arose in every quarter, but the benevolent gentlemen who were going to do so much for the horny-handed sons of toil were as deaf as adders to the cries.

When the Hon. Lyulph Stanley was called upon to give some explanation of the cause of the sudden collapse of the grand scheme, it was found that he had gone abroad for his health's sake; and on his magnificent

furniture there was a bill of sale, while his carriages and his horses had been disposed of some time before. As the hon. gentleman and his colleagues had neglected to leave their addresses, things looked fishy, and it fell to my lot to see what I could make of them.

Investigations soon proved that the whole affair was one of the most gigantic frauds on the gullibility of the ignorant that had been perpetrated during the century. Of course every one wondered how such barefaced robbery could have been carried on with such impunity for so long a time. But it was an exemplification of the old adage, "What is every one's business is nobody's business." The swindlers had not flown at high game; they had dipped their hands in the pockets of the humble and the lowly, and taken out pence instead of pounds. But drops of water make the ocean; grains of sand the sea shore. So these pence had enabled the exploiters to live in grand style, and to scuttle off with weighty purses.

As my investigations continued, I brought some rather curious facts to light. Mr. Jacob Oppenheim's real name was Jacob Adler. He was a Jew, and had been in business years before this in Liverpool, and had been convicted there of swindling. On his release he went to Berlin, where he lived for some years, but suddenly disappeared, and was badly wanted there. "Robert Carr Baintree" could lay no legitimate claim to that somewhat high-sounding appellation. He was only entitled to be known by the less poetical patronymic of James Bacon, and he had started his career as a lawyer's clerk, but had been discharged from his employment for some irregularity. Then for a time he picked up a living as an Old Bailey lawyer's tout; but his eager soul panted for higher things, and

thinking that as Bacon he would be severely handicapped in his aim to distinguish himself, he became Robert Carr Baintree, which was more aristocratic. Who the Hon. Lyulph Stanley was the reader will no doubt have guessed. He was none other than the son of good old John Marshall, whose name for upwards of forty years had been honoured and respected in the City.

Of course, when all this was revealed people marvelled greatly that such men should have been able to have done so much mischief. But then people of yore marvelled at Columbus's egg until they knew the secret, when they with uplifted eyebrows exclaimed, "How easy!" Swindling is easy too if you have but the assurance and the impudence, with the necessary heartlessness. Of the three rascals, Marshall was the only man whose connections were really good. And it became necessary for me to have interviews with Mrs. Marshall. She, with her daughter, had moved into a smaller house at Highgate, where they lived quiet, almost saintly lives, shedding the light of their benign influence around them.

Mrs. Marshall was a gentle, charming women, with a sweet, pensive face, framed with snowy hair; and the daughter was a reflex of the mother. The shock to them caused by the revelation of the son and brother's shame and disgrace was terrible, and, figuratively, they were bowed into the dust. But what seemed to effect them deeper still was the knowledge of the wide-spread misery which the swindlers had caused amongst the poor who had been induced to entrust their little savings to the "Society" from which they expected to get so much in return. I proved beyond doubt that neither Mrs. Marshall nor her daughter had any knowledge of Philip's whereabouts; and though if I had consulted my

own feelings I should have said that for their sakes I would rather he had escaped the earthly punishment of his evil deeds, it became my duty to hunt him and the other two rascals down.

For some time I could get no trace of them, then it came to my knowledge that Jacob Adler had a wife and family in Liverpool, so to Liverpool I went, and found that Mrs. Adler kept a tobacconist's shop in the Toxteth Park Road. For several days' running I visited her shop and made some small purchase each day, until at last I ventured to inquire for her husband. The question enraged her, not against me but him. It turned out that he had shamefully neglected her for years, and she had seen nothing of him and heard nothing of him for a long time. But incidentally she mentioned that he had a sister, of whom he was very fond, living in London: and having ascertained this lady's address, I returned to town. The sister, whose name was Stienberg, was a widow, and was in business as a second-hand furniture and curio dealer, in Wardour Street. Hers was one of those musty, fusty shops peculiar to the district. It was gloomy and dingy, and filled with a heterogenous collection of apparent rubbish, but which no doubt had a value; though to the unpractised eye it was difficult to see where the value was; while the odours of the place were wonderfully suggestive of the decay of mortal remains. However, there are plenty of mild lunatics—I beg pardon, enthusiasts, who haunt these kinds of places for worm-eaten old furniture, ancient china, rusty armour, and other relics of a bygone age. Large prices are paid. The things are treasured for a time, then the owners die. The bric-a-brac rubbish is probably sold for fewer shillings than the pounds that were paid, and it goes

back into the hands of the Jews, who sell it over again for pounds to some other mild—enthusiasts! In the character of one of these enthusiasts I visited Mrs. Stienberg's shop. A long green coat, woollen gloves several sizes too large for me, a wig of iron-grey hair, great horn spectacles, and Mother Gamp umbrella were the details I adopted to give effect to the character I had assumed.

Widow Stienberg was a coarse, fat, frowsy woman of a strikingly Jewish type, who, thinking she was going to make a haul out of me, stuck to me with the instincts of her race when they scent money in the air.

Day after day I went to her shop, examining this, pricing that, and turning over the heaps of mouldering relics of bygone generations, which filled this repository of dust-encumbered and worm-eaten rubbish, for it was veritable rubbish to me. My object was, of course, to keep a close watch on the woman for the slightest sign that might tend to betray her brother's whereabouts. I had learnt sufficient of the family history to be assured that she would rather suffer torture than willingly betray her brother into the hands of justice.

I began to think, however, that I should not succeed, and she evidently was coming to regard me as rather a nuisance, for so far she had not been successful in seeing the colour of my money. One afternoon as it was growing dusk, I was in the shop, and by the aid of a candle stuck in an ancient sconce she was displaying, in the hope of securing me as a customer, some faded brocaded curtains, that she assured me had once adorned the boudoir of the hapless Marie Antoinette. I was really feeling interested in the curtains, which in their pristine freshness must have been magnificent,

and have cost a small fortune. But suddenly there entered from the street an old bowed man with white hair, his face half hidden by a soft felt hat with a very broad brim, blue spectacles, and the upturned collar of his coat. He passed on, taking no notice of us, and entered the room at the back of the shop. He had all the appearance of an aged man, save in one thing—his gait. His walk had nothing of age in it. This struck me at once, and instantly all my suspicions were aroused. The light in the shop was very dim. In the back room, which was separated from the shop by a half-glazed door screened with a red blind, a lamp was burning. I was resolved to get a better view of the old man, so catching up one of the curtains which I was engaged in examining, I said, "I cannot see this thing here, I will go to the lamp," and before she could protest or stop me, I went towards the separating door, pushed it open and stood in the room. The old man was there. He seemed astonished and confused by my intrusion. He had taken off his hat and placed it on the table; he caught it up hurriedly, however, as I entered and placed it on his head again. But he was too late. I had seen enough to convince me that his look and appearance of age were simulated. I dropped the curtain, sprang towards him, knocked off his hat, tugged at his grey hair, and, as I expected, it came away in my hand. It was a wig.

"Jacob Adler, I arrest you on a charge of swindling," I exclaimed.

His sister screamed at the very top of her voice, and he seemed disposed to make a desperate resistance. But I seized him and dragged him through the shop to the door, and there I called on a passer-by to aid me in the name of the law. In a few minutes the assistance

of two constables was procured, and Jacob Adler, *alias* Oppenheim, was safe in custody. I then returned and searched the premises, and in a room which had been occupied by Adler as a bedroom, I found correspondence which showed that James Bacon had started for Mexico, and that Philip Marshall was living in Paris under the name of Rudolph Henty.

The next day I was off to Paris, and in a few hours after my arrival I effected the arrest of Marshall, and the manner of doing it was no less dramatic than that of Adler. I found that he was living in apartments on the Boulevard du Poissonière. He was not in when I called, but I was informed by a servant that he had gone with his landlady, her two daughters, and some friends of theirs to the somewhat notorious Moulin Rouge, which is a *café* restaurant and dancing garden of true Parisian type.

Here I found my man dining with his acquaintances. The business of the place was in full swing. Dancing was going on, and a light-hearted, frivolous crowd sauntered and lounged about, smoking, chatting, and laughing, while the diners sat in little arbours; and white-aproned, white-napkined, short-haired, bullet-headed waiters flitted to and fro attending to the wants of the numerous customers. I was accompanied by two French detectives, while at a convenient distance were three or four gendarmes waiting in case their services should be required. Marshall seemed to be in particularly good spirits, and was laughing and joking with his acquaintances. There were no outward signs that his conscience reproached him for the ruin and misery he had caused so many hundreds of poor people, whose lives had been blighted and their homes destroyed by his wickedness.

Stepping forward, I touched him on the shoulder, and said—

"Mr. John Marshall, I believe?"

There was an instantaneous change in his manner. His face blanched to a deathly whiteness, and his under lip quivered as if an electric current was passing through it.

"No," he stammered, "that is not my name."

"The Hon. Lyulph Stanley?" I suggested.

If possible he grew still paler, while his agitation became extreme. His companions looked on in stupid amazement; for, though I spoke in English, they saw by the man's manner that something was wrong.

"No, you fool!" he hissed, "that is not my name."

Then he rose to his feet, with a sweep of his arm pushed me on one side and made a dash forward; but in another instant he was sprawling at full length on the ground. One of the French detectives had thrust forth his leg and thrown him down. We secured him, but not without a struggle. He fought fiercely and desperately. The spectators became very excited. Women screamed, and men elbowed each other to get a near view. The music ceased; the dancing stopped. A thunderbolt had fallen amongst the gay and giddy throng.

We secured our man at last. He was ironed and led away, and then into his pale face came a look of the most utter despair. It was very evident he had considered himself perfectly safe. He had been living in a fool's paradise, and the sudden manner in which he was undeceived almost paralysed him.

It was several days before I got the necessary papers from England to secure his extradition. But my French colleagues kept a tight grip upon him, and as

he made an attempt during the first hours of his detention in the jail to commit suicide, he was watched night and day.

At last he was taken to Calais by two French detectives, and there handed over to my charge, and I conveyed him to London in irons.

He and Adler were duly put upon their trial; and it must still be fresh in the minds of many people, how day by day, as the links were forged around the two rascals, a story was told that made the heart of England thrill with sympathy and indignation. Unfortunately, the third man could not be secured and placed in the dock beside the other two, but the evidence proved that the trio of wretches had worked wide-spread misery amongst hundreds and hundreds of thrifty families. A conviction of course followed, and the prisoners were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment; while so keen was the sympathy that was manifested for the unfortunate sufferers who had been so cruelly swindled out of their earnings, that one of the great daily papers opened a subscription, and money began to pour in. About a week after this list was opened the editor of the paper received the following touching and pathetic letter:—

"Sir,—As day after day the story of my son's guilt has been unfolded, I have blushed with shame and wept with sorrow, a shame and sorrow that have to the full been shared by my only daughter. For half a century I lived with my late husband, whose name was one to conjure with in this great city, and whose honour was as pure as the drifted snow. My life with him was one of Arcadian simplicity, and we found all things good as God gave them to us. The only cloud that arose to darken our way was that caused by my unhappy son.

But little did I dream that I should know the day when he would make my white hair blanch still whiter, and my face burn with the reddening blush of unspeakable shame. But so it is, and no longer can I and my dear daughter enjoy a life that he has blasted and polluted. He has disgraced us, and death were infinitely preferable to life.

"It is little we can do to relieve the misery which he, the bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh, has caused, though that little must be done. This little is the widow's mite, and freely do I send it in the hope that you will distribute it in such way as seems to you fitting, so that it may lighten some heavy heart, lift some load of sorrow from bowed shoulders, and give peace where there is now strife. Everything I have in the world I have realized and now send it to you, and pray God's blessing on it.

"As for myself and daughter, life has lost its savour, and so we leave the world that has been rendered a purgatory to us by this graceless son and brother; and we shall plead before the throne of the Most High, that this unhappy man may be brought to see the error of his ways, and that the years that may be left to him will be spent in true repentance, and in an earnest and prayerful desire to make two blades of grass grow where now grows only one. By such means he may atone for his mighty sin, and make himself acceptable in the sight of God."

This remarkable and touching letter enclosed a cheque for £20,000, as the widow's mite towards the general contribution. Immediately on its receipt, as it was feared that the unhappy ladies would carry out the idea suggested of taking their lives, the police were com-

municated with, and a man was sent off post-haste to Highgate. But he was too late. Mother and daughter both lay dead from poison. Their sensitive and refined natures could not bear the shame that had come upon them, and so they yielded up their gentle souls to be judged by Him whose judgment errs not. If ever self-slaughter seemed like a virtue it was surely so in the case of these poor ladies, who gave their all that they had in the wide world to relieve some of the suffering that the son and brother had caused, and then weary and sick at heart they had passed from the bitterness of life to the mystery that lies beyond the Shadow of Death.

THE FATAL FORTY.

The Halford Bank Case is one of the examples which serve to show how very frequently a slender clue will lead to great discoveries. It is now a good many years ago since the name of Halford was so prominently before the public, but the mere mention of the name will probably recall to the reader's mind the exciting incidents which proved something more than the stereotyped nine days' wonder. Mr. John William Halford was a private banker in one of the pleasant little towns in Worcestershire. He was also a J.P., a director of several companies, and a man who managed to earn the trust and confidence of his fellow-men, and had it not been for one error, he might have gone down to his grave with honours thick upon him. But Mr. Halford illustrated in a most forcible manner how very frail human nature is even at its best, and how when life seems most fair the canker of an early sin will fret us almost into madness.

It was a broiling hot summer's day when I found myself for the first time in my life in the charming little Worcestershire town. I had gone down from London in response to a telegraphic message from Mr. Halford himself, in which he requested my professional services, and asked me to see him privately at his own house immediately on my arrival. It was a dreamy, Rip Van Winklish sort of village, I believe, at any time, but now on this hot summer day, when the air palpitated with the heat, and the sky was a deep lapis-

lazuli colour, it seemed to be the very home of the lotus-eaters. The blinds were down at all the shop windows. In the narrow lane that led direct from the station to the High Street a dusty and tattered tramp was stretched at full length on his stomach fast asleep by the side of the ditch. At the end of the lane where it merged into the High Street was the hostelry called the "Bell and Horse," and in front of the house, by the horse-trough, was a heavily-ladened wain, and the four horses attached to it were blinking dreamily in the sun, while the waggoners themselves were seated at a rustic table near the door, and were both fast asleep with empty tankards before them. A little farther on I came upon a village dog, also asleep on the footway; and still farther on Sheepshanks, the butcher, slept in a chair at his door, under the awning, and a huge tom-cat stretched across his knees was also in a state of oblivion. It really seemed as if everything and every-body had yielded to the somnolency of the fervid day, and I wondered what crime it could possibly be that I was called upon to investigate in this particularly sleepy place, where all seemed so Arcadian and blissful, as if no sound of the fret and passion of the outer world could be heard here. The High Street was paved with cobble-stones, between which the grass grew in patches; and in the very centre of the roadway of this important thoroughfare was the "Town Hall," an ancient and rusty red brick building, which looked so antiquated, so hoary and tumble-down, that it might have been erected in the year one. It was isolated and built on arches. The main building was furnished with small latticed windows, and was surmounted by a wooden bell tower. Wedged in between the more modern buildings, one of the old rustic cottages of a

bygone time, was to be seen here and there the thatched roofs and porches of gnarled and twisted oaken branches, presenting a very incongruous effect beside the houses of modern date. In front of these cottages were little patches of garden ablaze now with flowers, and filling the air with a delicious aroma.

This little village, for village it was, although the villagers loved to call it a town, could only boast of a population of about fourteen hundred; but it was the centre of a most extensive agricultural district, and twice a week a market was held in it, when, as I was given to understand, it became particularly lively. It was still three-quarters of a mile from the railway station, but until quite a recent period the nearest station had been six miles off.

As I made my way along the High Street, which, on the whole, had a very rural appearance, for in some of the gardens referred to trees grew, and their branches projected over the pavement, I came upon "Halford's Bank." It was a modern, red brick building, with white stone dressings, and with the exception of the Rectory, which adjoined the ancient church where the rude forefathers of the hamlet slept, it was the most imposing erection in the town. As Mr. Halford had particularly requested me to see him privately at his house, I did not go into the Bank, but had to inquire of a drowsy-looking constable, whom I met on my way, how far it was to the Manor, Mr. Halford's residence. This guardian of the peace was infinitely more suggestive of the chawbacon than a nineteenth-century bobby; his clothes seemed all too small and uncomfortable for him, and his fat, perspiring face had "pork and bacon" written legibly on it. "The Manor be three miles from here, master, on top o' t' hill," he

said, in answer to my question. As three miles farther on such a sweltering day was rather appalling, I inquired if I could get a conveyance of any kind, and Chawbacon informed me that if I went to the "Bull and Mouth," the position of which he indicated by jerking his thumb in the direction I was to go, I could get a fly, or mayhap "Th' master" would send "a chap" to drive me over "i' th' dogcart." I succeeded in finding the "Bull and Mouth," and was duly driven in a dogcart to the Manor, which was an old mansion considerably modernized, and standing in extensive and well-wooded grounds.

Mr. Halford received me in an exceedingly pleasant room, lighted by a large half-circular window, that commanded a magnificent view over the surrounding country. The room was luxuriously furnished, and the walls were adorned with many choice works of art.

Mr. Halford was a man of about sixty, with a bald head, and a white beard and moustache that gave him rather a venerable appearance. He was of medium height, inclined to corpulency, and his general appearance was suggestive of a decided love for the flesh-pots of Egypt; and also I was soon to learn that his appearance did not belie him; but now I noticed that his pleasant, genial face was clouded with an expression of grave anxiety and trouble.

"I am glad you have arrived, Mr. Donovan," he said somewhat mournfully, as he extended his hand to me, and bade me be seated. The preliminary greeting over, he took up his position in a large lounge chair, and covering his eyes with his hand for a few moments, sighed and appeared to be suffering from some mental distress. But with an effort he recovered his self-possession, and as he toyed nervously with the seals

on his watch-chain, he continued—"I am the local banker here. The bank bearing my name was founded by my grandfather more than fifty years ago, and our business transactions are of a very varied character as well as very extensive; and no one has ever dared to question the stability of the house. But a very serious thing has now happened. For some years I have had in my employ a young man named Arthur Judson—such trust did I repose in him that he became my confidential clerk, and two years ago I installed him as manager of a branch house which I opened in a village about ten miles from here. To my horror and amazement I learnt three days ago that he had absconded, and, so far as I have been able to make an investigation up to the present, he would seem to have robbed the bank of thousands, but he has made away with or carried off a large number of valuable securities which have from time to time been deposited by customers against over-draft, as well as for safety. I do not so much care about the money, as that I will make good, for there is no hope of recovering it from him. But the loss of the securities is another thing. Unless they can be got back the bank will be ruined. At present the public have no idea to what extent Judson has robbed us. They know there are defalcations, but the prevailing opinion is they are not serious. Now, Mr. Donovan, I am painfully anxious that this opinion should be fostered, but what I want you to do in the meantime is to endeavour to trace Judson and exact from him, as the price of his immunity from arrest, the instant restoration of the securities.

"Immunity from arrest!" I exclaimed, in amazement.

"Yes, I do not wish to have him arrested."

"But are you not aware, sir, that if your wishes are carried out, you will be compounding a felony?" I said.

"Good God," he groaned, "I never thought of that," and springing to his feet, he paced up and down the room in a state of great agitation. Suddenly he stopped, and asked with a certain peremptoriness—"What do you suggest doing, then?"

"Surely, sir, there is but one thing to do in a case of this kind, and that is, arrest the rascal as soon as possible, and let him pay the penalty of the crime."

"But there are reasons, strong reasons, why this should not be done."

"If he has committed theft, and to the extent you state," I replied, "no reasons can be allowed to weigh against the punishment his crime merits."

Mr. Halford's distress increased, and he passed his hand in a troubled way through his scant grey hairs. At last, after a considerable pause, he exclaimed—

"Very well, then; effect his arrest if you can; and at any cost recover the securities."

"Has Judson any relatives hereabouts?" I asked.

"None. He occupied apartments in the house of a highly respectable widow lady, named Pierrepoint; she is the widow of the former rector of the place, and she has been like a mother to Judson."

"Have you taken no means to ascertain where Judson is likely to have gone?"

"None."

"What is his age?"

"Six-and-twenty."

"Married?"

"No."

Having obtained from Mr. Halford such information as I thought necessary, I accepted his invitation to lunch, during which he casually told me that he was a bachelor, and a widowed sister managed his household for him. This lady, a very pleasant, genial person indeed, presided at the table, and speaking of Judson's wrong-doing, she said that she thought her brother was far too confiding altogether. He had given Judson a great deal too much power, and the rascal had abused it. And she expressed a sincere hope that I might be able to arrest him, and that he would duly meet with the punishment he deserved.

"My brother, I know, would spare him," she added, "but I wouldn't, for I think he has behaved shamefully all along, and if ever a man deserved imprisonment, he does."

As this expression of opinion seemed to give her brother great pain, judging by the expression of his face, I adroitly turned the conversation, and after he and I had discussed a most excellent glass of old port, and smoked a no less excellent cigar, I took my leave, and made my way at once to the neighbouring village where the branch bank was situated.

I could not help thinking that I had to deal with a puzzle that was more than usually complicated; and Mr. Halford's desire to screen the man who had robbed him, and so seriously jeopardized the credit of the bank, set me pondering very deeply, until I came to the conclusion that he had a potent reason for that desire, which, if I could discover, might help me very materially in my efforts to unravel the tangled threads of this interesting case. Necessarily I called upon Mrs.

Pierrepoint. She was a middle-aged lady, with two grown-up daughters. When she heard what my mission was, she expressed her great surprise that Judson should have committed himself so deeply, and she gave me to understand that her youngest daughter, Ellen, was engaged to be married to him. She told me that Judson had been in the neighbourhood for about seven years, having been brought from London by Mr. Halford, and nothing was known of his history or his connection; he was believed to be highly respectable. The revelation, therefore, of his defalcations had been a great shock to her daughters.

The evening he went away he led them to suppose that he had been suddenly ordered up to London by Mr. Halford on important business, and should be absent for a few days. He left by the mail train, and his *fiancée*, Miss Violet Pierrepoint, went to the station with him.

I wished to see this young lady, but was given to understand that she was in such a state of prostration owing to the shock she had received that she could not see any one. I therefore inquired if Judson had left any of his things behind, and was told that he had taken most of his luggage with him, but there was still a box in his room which I was free to examine, if I though it necessary. Of course I did think it necessary, and proceeded to do so at once. In the box I found some old clothes, a few books, and about half-a-dozen letters, which were without date or address, but they showed he had been carrying on an intrigue, and the letters were all signed "Katey." As the envelopes had been destroyed, it was impossible to tell where the letters had been posted; but the contents seemed to indicate that the writer resided in London. I took

charge of these letters, also a sheet of foolscap paper, on which was this problem—

40

40 40

400

40 00 0

400 000

The paper was covered with repetitions of the above; and on the first glance it appeared to be nothing more than the meaningless scribbling of an idle person. But after a little reflection I came to the conclusion that it had a significance which was worth trying to define. I argued with myself thus :—

A man does not put down figures arranged in this order on a sheet of paper unless there is something floating in his mind to which the figures have a distinct reference.

I noted that forty was taken as a base, and each of the other sums was a multiple of forty. That fact suggested some coherent idea, and I could not help thinking then that this might ultimately afford me a clue.

My first step was to ascertain if the figures were in the handwriting of Judson. This I did by comparing them with other figures written by him, and so set that matter at rest. I then had a confidental chat with Mrs. Pierrepoint, during which I asked her if she had heard of any one known to Judson as "Katey," but, as I expected, her answer was "No," and she glanced at me inquiringly, as though she divined that there was a motive for the question; so I tried to turn the conversation, not wishing to distress her, but she insisted on knowing why I put the question, so I told her about the letters, whereupon she waxed highly indignant, and

said it was clear from those letters that Judson had trifled with her daughter's feelings, and was an unmitigated scoundrel. That was my own view, though I did not give expression to it then, but I felt that I should ultimately be able to prove it up to the hilt.

I had engaged a bed for the night at the village inn, a quaint, old-time hostelry, bearing the very unusual sign of the "Lamb and Shepherd," and the swinging signboard outside in the roadway bore a capital pictorial representation of a shepherd rescuing a lamb from a snowdrift. Later on, I learnt tradition had it, that the sign had been painted by an itinerant Italian, who subsequently made a name as an artist in his own country.

The inn proved particularly comfortable, and after I had refreshed the inner man with a well-served and well-cooked dinner, I threw myself on a couch near an open window, from which there was a magnificent view, and through which floated the delicious fragrance of sweetbriar and roses. The sun had set and the sky was tropical in its intensity of colour. As I watched the smoke from my cigar float languidly on the motionless air, I set to work out the problem I had to solve. Those figures of 40 and their multiples haunted me, and then the light seemed to dawn.

"The man who wrote those figures down," I thought, "is a gambler; and he attaches some strong significance to 40."

The more I dwelt on that, the more it seemed to me to be in the highest degree probable. Then again, I was convinced inferentially that between Judson and Mr. Halford there was some strange connection, and had it not been for the stolen securities, the loss of which so seriously threatened the stability of the bank, he would have taken no steps to bring about the arrest

of the delinquent. Thirdly, it was evident Judson had been carrying on a correspondence with some one who styled herself "Katey;" and, summing up the various points, I felt convinced that he had gone off with "Katey," and I carefully re-perused the letters to see if they would afford me any clue as to where he was likely to have gone. It struck me at last that a clue was contained in the following passage:—

"Do you remember that rapturous night when the stars were mirrored in the sleeping sea, and the fire-flies, like tiny meteors, flashed among the palm-trees, while on the odorous air came the soft sounds of dreamy music? Ah! how the memory comes back to me now. I was drunk with joy, and felt that life was a ravishing dream, the world a Paradise, and that you were Lord of all! I wonder now if those feelings and impressions would return again under the same conditions, and, given the same *mise-en-scène*. Shall we try? One hour of such glorious life were worth a world of pain."

The woman who penned these lines was evidently a woman of education, of sentiment, of poetical feeling; and one whose nature was capable of a great devotion, a great sacrifice. The "rapturous night" to which she alluded was not spent in England. The fire-flies and the palm-trees made that obvious. Yes, I had got a clue at last, and I retired to rest feeling sure that I was already on the track of Judson. "Man fell originally by woman, and man falls by woman still." "Katey has tempted, and Judson has yielded." This thought floated through my brain as I sank to sleep, and it shaped itself into my dreams.

In good time the next morning I waited on Mr. Halford. I found him at the bank, and had an interview with him in his private room. There was a

haggard, tired look in his face, as if he had passed a sleepless and troubled night.

"I presume," I began, "that Judson was in the habit of having an annual holiday?"

"Oh, yes! He generally went away about the end of August, and took three weeks. But if he desired it, he could always get two or three days at almost any time."

"Did he avail himself much of that privilege?"

"Of late he has done so."

"Did he go away last August?"

"Yes."

"How long was he absent?"

"I think nearly a month."

"You know where he went to?"

"To the South of England, I believe."

"You only believe so?"

"I have his word for it."

"Did he not write to you?"

"No."

"One more question, Mr. Halford. Do you know if Judson was given to gambling?"

This question intensified the look of keen distress in Mr. Halford's face, and he turned away as if to prevent my seeing it.

"I think he was to some extent," he answered, after a pause.

"There is yet another question or two I must put." I said. "Knowing that he had gambling tendencies, do you think you did well to retain him in your service?"

"I took a very deep interest in him," came the answer, in a voice that plainly told of great agitation.

"You have known Judson a long time, sir?" I remarked, as I rose to go.

"Yes, since his childhood."

"In that answer, Mr. Halford, you give me the key-note to your sorrow," I said tenderly.

"What do you mean?" he demanded sharply, as though he deemed me impertinent.

"If I have looked into your heart, sir, you must forgive me," I said. "It is my business to read the heart and divine motives. Arthur Judson is your own son."

There was a sudden flash of anger in Halford's eyes as I thus unlocked his secret, but it died out as suddenly as it came, and as the unhappy gentleman bowed his head on the table and wept, he moaned—

"God pity me! it is so, it is so. His mother was my first and only love. She died in bringing this unworthy boy into the world."

"I will not touch the wound any more," I answered, "and I can but wish this matter had been in the hands of any one else but myself."

He rose quickly to his feet, and seized my hand in his own, which was trembling, and in a voice that was also unsteady, he exclaimed—

"I thank God that you have taken the matter up. Judson knows not that I am his father. He has always been under the impression that I was a friend of his father, who left him in my charge. Perhaps I have been weak in not letting him know the truth, but we cannot all be wise. I have loved him, but I fling that love to the winds now. His base ingratitude has hardened me. I owe a duty first to my clients; secondly, to the law; thirdly, to society. That duty I will do unflinchingly. Need I say any more?—beyond this, respect while I live the secret you have dragged from me. When I am dead I care not if you make it known."

I returned the pressure of his hand for answer, and

went forth on my quest. I caught the mid-day train to London, and that night crossed to Paris, on my way to Monte Carlo. Why to Monte Carlo? may be asked. Because I had by a process of reasoning peculiar to myself divined that there it was I should find Judson. The fatal passion of gambling had seized upon him. The odorous night, the sleeping sea, the mirrored stars, the meteor-like fire-flies, the palm-trees, the dreamy music of which "Katey" had spoken and longed for again, were too suggestive of Monte Carlo in the summer to be overlooked. At least, I could not be blind to it. And then the mysterious number of 40 had some fatal fascination for him, and he had gone to the favoured spot on the shores of the tideless sea that he might put some wild theory into practice. At least, that was my deduction, and I intended to put it to the proof. I was armed with his photograph, which I was told was an excellent one. It represented a handsome young man, but it seemed to me that there was a reckless, dare-devil look in the eyes, and a pitiable weakness about the mouth. It was a face that I did not at all like, for it lacked character and strength, and was essentially sensual, while it plainly indicated a consuming vanity. I reached my destination at night—a sultry night, with the stars burning in the heavens like jets of living fire, while over the oily sea came a hot wind like the breath of a simoom.

As every one knows, the summer is not the season at Monte Carlo. It is the winter when the place is filled to overflowing with foreigners. Then the eye is satiated with ravishing costumes and the flashing of jewels, while the air is filled with the sounds of many languages, amongst which the hoarse, grating, and objectionable American twang is particularly distinguish-

able. Then the hot fever of reckless life reaches its maximum, and the greed for gain shows itself on every face. From early morn till late at night the maelstrom of excitement whirls and roars, and victim after victim —fascinated by the glitter and glare—is sucked in and ruined or lost. Then it is that the most revolting side of human nature comes prominently uppermost, until an impassioned and cynical onlooker might well exclaim, "Every man in his own heart carries his own hell, and men and women are composed of two-thirds fiend to one of human." It would be a sweeping stricture, but, alas! justified. In summer the conditions are somewhat changed. Few foreigners are to be found there; the torrid heat keeps them away. But it is in summer that, to my mind, this favoured spot approximated most closely to an earthly Paradise. Nature herself seems to be dreaming, and the dream is one of ravishing splendour. I had often been to Monte Carlo before, but I thought as I saw it on this night, when on the languid air floated dreamy music from the band in front of the Casino, where palms were full of tiny flashing lights of the fire-flies, and the odour of a thousand flowers steeped one's senses in the delicious languidness and oblivion of the hard, cold, vulgar world as revealed in great cities— that it was a spot of entrancing beauty, a masterpiece of nature's handiwork; but, like the maggot in the fair-seeming apple, man cankered it. I should have liked to have put from me all thoughts of the painful errand that had brought me there. I should have preferred to have fixed my mind on something in which man did not figure; but my sense of duty was too strong for that, and I retired to rest wondering if my reasonings and deductions had led me on the wrong track.

In good time on the morrow I began to make

cautious inquiries that were calculated to obtain me the information I was seeking, and ere the noon had come I learnt that I was right. Judson had been there. He was accompanied by a lady—a young, good-looking woman, of six or seven and twenty. They stayed in one of the principal hotels as man and wife; passing under the name of Mr. and Mrs. De Trafford. The man had gambled heavily for a few days. It was known that he attached some mysterious importance to the number "40," and he began by staking forty francs. He had a run of luck. Then he staked the equivalent for forty English sovereigns. He again won. Then he went on increasing his stakes by multiples of forty and still won, until he was the possessor of a vast sum, which he staked in the maximums allowed by the rules of the gaming house; and suddenly Fortune, which had smiled on him only to betray, let fall her sword, and smote. Like a flood rushing through a burst sluice-gate his money went, and he was ruined.

Two days before my arrival he had left with his lady companion, and it was known they had booked to Marseilles; I had, therefore, passed them on the way.

That evening I shifted my ground again, and followed to the French seaport. On the very morning of my arrival the papers were full of sensations. An English lady and gentleman had been found dead in their bedroom, which they occupied at a hotel. They had committed suicide by suffocating themselves with a brazier of charcoal, and were discovered locked in each other's arms on the bed. The report said that they were supposed to belong to London, but had come from Monte Carlo or Nice.

As I read this I could not doubt that I was too late. A greater Nemesis than man's law had exacted a terrible

revenge. I soon confirmed this. The man who had so recklessly taken his life was Judson; and his companion who had voluntarily accompanied him into the dark valley of the shadow of death was no doubt the "Katey" of the letters. It turned out that he had come to Marseilles to try and raise money from some of the many Jews who haunt that place; and who are ready to advance money on anything upon which they can make a big profit, if they are compelled to sell. But the only security he had to offer was English title-deeds, and the Jews would have none of them. And so the wretched man awoke from his mad dream of suddenly acquiring enormous riches to find that the world was grey, and what he thought were flowers had turned to ashes in his grasp. Thus it came to pass that he went forth to the darkness of the grave: for the unknown terrors of death appalled him less than the known terrors of life.

"O pain! O tears!" Would man, I wonder, grow less evil, even if an angel of God moved through the world proclaiming, trumpet-tongued, "That the wages of sin is death."

Judson was buried in a dishonoured grave, with his companion beside him. Strangely enough, no particulars of her were forthcoming. No one identified her, no one claimed her, and her secret was locked till the end of time in the darkness of the tomb. Perhaps it was better so!

I was enabled to restore the stolen deeds to Mr. Halford, who heard the news that I had to tell him with an agony he could not conceal. Of course the story of the tragedy found its way into the English papers, which made a toothsome morsel of it. And somehow or other—how it is impossible to say—Mr. Halford's secret was brought to light; and equally,

of course, the stiff-necked, Puritanical respectables who could do no wrong pointed the finger of scorn at him, and exclaimed, with that air of virtuous indignation they know so well how to assume—" Oh, shocking ! "

Poor man ! He bore it all in silence, but it was a festering sore that gradually corroded his life away, and he went down into the grave before his time, finding, it is to be hoped, that peace which the world cannot give.

THE MARFIELD MYSTERY.

Do you happen to know Marfield, my dear reader? If not, take my advice and journey thither on the first brilliant day that our all-too-changeable climate favours us with. Not only will Marfield claim your regard by reason of the natural beauty of its situation, but its quaint houses, its ancient church, its magnificent trees, its venerable beeches, its old-fashioned gardens, and the hospitality and primitiveness of its people, no less than its out-of-the-world peace and quietude, will appeal to you in a very forcible manner.

The village itself lies four miles from the station as the crow flies. If you go by the high road, you will traverse some six miles of ground before you reach your destination, for the road makes a long bend in order to avoid a steep hill that dips down into the valley. Here and there along the road you come to a lonely farmhouse, or it may be a rustic cottage, with ruddy-faced children playing about; and in the summer the air will be heavy with the scent of roses and the rich perfume of the honeysuckle, which thrives amazingly in these parts, and smothers the porches of the cottages with the rank profusion of its growth. On either side of the road, nearly the whole way, are deep woods, where the bracken grows almost breast high, and blue-bells, foxgloves, and many other wild flowers make a perfect blaze of colour in their season. These woods are the song-birds' paradise. Almost every English songster may be found here, and the woodland melodies

that will charm your ear as you pass along will make you feel that our country has something to boast of after all. In these woods are heard the very first cuckoo notes, as the welcome foreigner heralds the spring ; and later, when the summer sun has made joyous the heart of nature, and stirred all things to riotous revel and a wild harmony of gladsomeness, you may pause on the edge of these mystic woodlands at night while Titania and Oberon hold their court. But though you will probably fail to catch a glimpse of the little folk as they dance and gambol on the velvety sward, you will have to be strangely constituted indeed if you are not thrilled to your innermost depths by the rich, plaintive, sweetly-sad notes of a dreamy nightingale. This fascinating and poetical bird of night seems to have a passionate fondness for the dear old Marfield woods, where primitive nature may yet be found. Beautiful and attractive as the road is, however, it must yield the palm to the footpath that runs through the meadows. You turn to the right as you leave the station, and fifty yards or so will bring you to a stile, over which you must clamber into a wood. Following the path, you will, on emerging from the wood, suddenly stand still with admiration, if you be a stranger, and emotional, for there suddenly bursts upon your gaze a panorama that is absolutely unrivalled in England. It is a pastoral scene, but one made up of all those elements of rural beauty which are peculiarly English, and cannot be equalled by any country in the world. It is said that you take in at one sweep of the eye upwards of a thousand square miles, including some of the richest agricultural land in this part of the country. Let us suppose that it is early summer, with a cloudless sky and a brilliant sun. How the scene is all

a-quiver with the radiating warmth, and how the very air palpitates with the passionate outpourings of the up-soaring larks! How the wind sighs softly like a lover wooing; and how those broad stretches of young green corn bend and sway like a coy maiden struggling playfully in her wooer's arms, as he seeks to snatch kisses from her pretty lips! And how deliciously odorous is the red and white hawthorn; and how peaceful, solemn, silent, and restful is the whole scene! The lowing of the kine that comes up softly from the lush meadows there at your feet only serves to emphasize this restfulness, and is a perfect chord in the symphony of silence. To speak of "symphony of silence" may seem like a contradiction in terms, but he who has a soul for the tuneful voices and the beauties of nature will understand what I mean.

From this standpoint which I am endeavouring to describe you do not see Marfield, as it lies beyond that wood-crowned ridge, and you must descend down into the hollow, cross many stiles, traverse the willow-fringed path that runs for half a mile or more by the gurgling stream, beloved by every species of British dragon-fly, and then climb again to the woody height, and through the openings between the trees you will catch a glimpse of the red-roofed houses that are built with such delightful irregularity, that, as you view them from this spot, some seem to be on top of the others, and all of them are higgledy-piggledy, as if they had been shaken up in a gigantic dice-box and dropped out anyhow. The old square-towered Norman church stands apart on a sunny slope, and the dead who sleep around it take their rest in one of the most exquisite of God's acres, which is ever ablaze with flowers in the summer and filled with the melody of the woodland warblers.

The path we are following dips again, then rises once more, and getting over the final stile we find ourselves in a narrow lane, completely overarched by magnificent chestnuts. At the end of this shady avenue we come upon the churchyard, which is entered from here by half-a-dozen moss-green steps, surmounted by an ancient and rustic porchway, and a wooden-gate turning on a centre pivot and self-closing by means of a pulley and a ponderous block of wood attached to a rope. The lane now bears away to the left, and just before entering the village we reach the lodge gates of the Manor. These gates are said to be Norman work, and in the centre of each, surrounded by a knotted scroll, is the coat of arms of the ancient family of the Alleyanes. The gates are hung on massive square stone pillars, each surmounted by the strange device of a ball, from which springs a mailed hand grasping a dagger. This is the crest of the Alleyanes.

It is a good ten minutes' walk from the lodge up to the house, which is one of those typical English homes we are all so proud of. The original block of buildings was a massive square stone structure, with a battlemented roof and a tower springing from one corner. A moat formerly surrounded the house, which was a place of considerable strength, and well adapted for the rude times, when the owners had to hold themselves ever ready to offer stubborn defence against unprovoked, or, it might be, provoked attack. The building underwent many changes during the centuries of men that came and passed away; and save in its external arrangements, its original features were destroyed. Then some later owner built out two long wings and constructed a terrace promenade in front. But at last the Alleyanes became extinct; or, at any rate, that branch of the

family which for centuries had made their homes in Marfield. For a long time the picturesque and ivy-covered old mansion stood empty. Neither a purchaser nor a tenant could be found for it, and it began to fall into decay, so that there was some talk of cutting the estate up for building plots, when an offer was received for the purchase of the place from a Mr. Luke Champel, a lawyer who had been in practice in London. The offer was in the end accepted, and the property passed into Champel's possession.

Very little was known of him at this time, and though most lawyers are able to live very snugly on the exorbitant fees they so shamelessly squeeze out of their clients, people wondered how it was Mr. Champel had the means to incur the large outlay necessitated in the purchase of the manor of Marfield. However, it soon became noised about that Champel, who bore the reputation of being an exceedingly clever lawyer, had successfully carried through a Chancery suit, in which a litigant laid claim to property valued at half a million sterling. The triumphant litigant died soon afterwards, and, being at loggerheads with most of his relatives, he distributed something like a quarter of a million amongst charitable institutions, in order that he—poor man—might purchase a right to one of the high places of Heaven; and the rest of his fortune he left to Champel, as a recognition of the dogged way in which the lawyer had fought and won his case.

So much became known, and perhaps Mr. Champel felt it wise and good to let so much be known; but beyond that there was, it seems, much mystery surrounding him. That is to say, about his past he was singularly reticent. Not even the most irrepressible

busybody in Marfield—and even dear, delightful, rustic Marfield was plagued with this objectionable species of human wasp—could discover aught about Champel's family connections or his past history. It soon became common gossip, however, that, though married, he had no family. His own age was about fifty, while his wife was not more than twenty-five. She was a Spanish lady of exquisite beauty, but it was understood that she had spent the best half of her life in England, her father having been a merchant in the city of London.

Mr. Champel proved to be a man of considerable culture and great taste. He loved art, but loved nature better. He was studious too, and fond of books; and was a bit of an archæologist, something of an antiquarian, a dabbler in botany, and quite a respectable amateur astronomer. He speedily became a favourite, for he was clever without any pretension, deferential to the opinions of others, though somewhat dogmatic in his own views, but possibly that was due to his legal training. And above all, he was what a lawyer seldom is—a true gentleman, with something of the old chivalric notions of honour. He gave liberally but unostentatiously to charities, and was a warm supporter of the arts and sciences, and did what he could to foster a love of them amongst the people. His new home, with all its beautiful surroundings, became his hobby, and he bestowed reverential care upon it. Not a tree would he have cut down, not a shrub disturbed, not a window altered. The craze for modern innovation found no favour with him.

His wife in most respects seemed to share his taste. She soon established herself as a favourite, and her vivacity, her cleverness, and general cheerfulness, to say

nothing of her beauty, won her troops of admirers. But it came in time, by inference or otherwise, to be understood that on one point at least the husband and wife were at variance. Mr. Champel's tastes disposed him to a quiet, undisturbed, studious country life, but Mrs. Champel was fond of company, amusement, gaiety; and as her husband was passionately attached to her, he allowed his own feelings to be secondary to hers, and the result was the Manor became a centre of festivity, and guests were numerous. In this manner five years passed away, and then the dark shadow of a strange mystery fell upon the beautiful home. It was during Christmas week, and a large number of guests were enjoying the hospitality of the old Manor. There was a ball on Boxing Day, to which all the gentry of the district were invited, and it was unanimously voted the most brilliant and successful festive gathering within the memory of the oldest Marfield inhabitant.

On New Year's Eve, although some of the guests had taken their departure, the house was still pretty full. It was remembered afterwards that on this particular day Mr. Champel appeared to be out of sorts and low-spirited, though he did not complain, and when asked if he was unwell, he answered with a forced cheerfulness that he was all right. After dinner he was missed, and some inquiries were made for him, but it would appear that amongst the majority of the guests an impression prevailed that, not feeling well, but not wishing to cast any damper on the enjoyment of his visitors, he had quietly retired to his room. About eleven o'clock, however, some one point-blank asked Mrs. Champel if her husband had gone to bed. Whereupon she expressed herself as unable to say, but

she sent for Mr. Champel's valet, and told him to inquire if his master was in his room. The man soon returned with the information that his master was not in his room, and he did not know where he was. He had not seen him for hours. Inquiries were at once set on foot, and these inquiries soon made it evident that the host had disappeared, and was nowhere to be found. This was considered remarkable, as he was very punctilious on all points of etiquette; and for him to thus absent himself from his guests without any explanation was so unusual and contrary to his habits that some uneasiness manifested itself, though the uneasiness did not become acute until after midnight, when he failed to appear to toast his visitors, and wish them a happy new year. Then the people were seized with real alarm, and a cloud darkened the festivities. All sorts of conjectures were rife, and there was much talk and discussion until the gentlemen of the party suggested that a thorough and systematic search should be made. Mrs. Champel was in great distress, and, accompanied by some of the servants, she insisted on going all over the house, while others of the servants and the male guests provided themselves with lanterns and went through the greenhouses, outhouses, gardens, and shrubberies, but not a trace of Mr. Champel was discovered anywhere. Although the day had been tolerably fine it had threatened snow, and that night the threat was realized, for a snowstorm swept over the country such as had not been known for many years. It was exceptionally severe in the district of Marfield, and when the morning dawned the land for miles and miles was buried beneath nearly a foot of snow, but in places exposed to the wind the snow had drifted to many feet deep.

The uneasiness experienced by the guests at the Manor on Mr. Champel's account now became an agony of distress, and the worst fears began to manifest themselves. Firstly, no one could suggest a plausible reason why he should have left the house, which it seemed evident he must have done; and, secondly, having left the house, they were equally at a loss to account for his continued absence, except on the implied but not expressed hypothesis that he was dead.

Amongst the guests was the late Sir Villiers Tremlin, who was an intimate friend of Mr. Champel. I knew Sir Villiers very well, and as New Year's Day wore on, and no tidings of the missing man were forthcoming, he telegraphed to me on his own responsibility asking me to start post-haste for Marfield. I also knew Marfield. It was a favourite haunt of mine. Its peace and restfulness and its natural beauties had a fascination for me; and there was a quaint old hostelry there—an old-time place, the comforts of which could not be surpassed. I had spent some very happy hours in that dear old inn, and had wandered and dreamed in the Marfield woods and lanes until the night side of life was forgotten, and the world appeared a goodly world. Although I had never met Mr. Champel, I had heard of him; but in complying with Sir Villiers Tremlin's request it never occurred to me for one brief instant that the business he wished me to undertake was to solve the mystery surrounding Mr. Champel's sudden and strange disappearance from his home.

It was too late for me to get a train that night, but I got the express the next morning, which leaves London at 9.30. It passes Marfield, but stops at a junction ten miles farther on, and from there I posted, reaching the Manor as the day was waning. The distance from the

junction by the road was a little over twenty miles, but the state of the roads, owing to the heavy snow, made it exceedingly difficult to get along at all. However, the journey was accomplished safely, and immediately on my arrival at the house I sent in my card to Sir Villiers, who came to me in a few minutes to the library. His face wore a very grave expression, and he seemed deeply concerned.

He briefly told me the circumstances which had induced him to telegraph for me, and expressed his fears that his friend must be dead.

"All day long," said Sir Villiers, "I noted that Mr. Champel was much depressed and out of sorts, and two or three times I asked him to confide in me and tell me what his trouble was, for I was sure he had a trouble; but he laughed, though it was a forced laugh, and assured me he would get over it. He said he thought he had a fit of the blues. His nature was such a buoyant one, and he was usually so cheerful, and took such an interest in everything around him, that for him to speak of having the blues seemed absurd. However, I did not feel anything like real concern until the afternoon, when I joined him in the smoking-room. His depression seemed to have increased, and after taking a cigar, lighting it, and puffing at it for some moments, he suddenly dashed it into the fire-place, sprang to his feet, ran his fingers through his hair, and began to pace the room as if suffering from some keen mental distress. As you may imagine, I was very much astonished, and I begged of him to make me his confessor if he thought I could be of the slightest service. He thereupon seized my hand, wrung it, and said that he had a load on his mind, but he begged and prayed of me not to breathe a word to anybody, as he did not wish to mar the harmony

of the gathering, and he added that he would confide in me, and ask my advice in the course of a day or two. As some gentlemen came into the room at this moment the subject was dropped, and I have not seen my friend since."

"Have you formed any theory to account for his disappearance, Sir Villiers?" I asked.

"Yes," came the answer, "I have. Although I know nothing of his financial affairs, my own opinion is that he was suddenly called upon to face some ruinous loss, and that it turned his brain."

"And he has committed suicide?" I suggested.

"Precisely. That is my fear. Or sudden mental aberration caused him to wander from his home and he perished in the storm."

So far as I was able to form a judgment on what I had now heard, that theory seemed to me a rational one. And, agreeable to Sir Villiers Tremlin's special request, I agreed to keep my presence on the scene a secret, but to resort to some means to trace the missing man. This, of course, handicapped me to a considerable extent, but I said I would do my best, and I started on the assumption that Mr. Champel was lying dead somewhere under the snow within no great distance of his own house. Of course, news of the unfortunate gentleman's strange disappearance had spread throughout the district, and caused very considerable excitement. The wildest and most improbable theories found expression, and everybody seemed to have some suggestion to offer on the matter. I could find no one, however, who could give me the least bit of practical information. No one seemed to have noticed Mr. Champel after he was in the smoking-room with Sir Villiers Tremlin. In the first instance my inquiries were necessarily directed to

trying to discover if he had been seen in the village, or by any of the country people in the neighbourhood. But the answer everywhere was "No." Now this was, to say the least, remarkable; because a man so well known as he was for miles and miles round could hardly have gone far without being recognized. Nor did he leave by train, because if he had appeared at the station some of the porters must have recognized him. This strengthened my belief in Sir Villiers's theory, that in a moment of mental aberration he had wandered away and perished.

He had not really been missed until dinner-time, that is, at seven o'clock. It was about four when he was in the smoking-room with his friend, and the great storm did not begin until near midnight. Between four and midnight he might have gone a considerable distance, and in the darkness he could have wandered off without being recognized, for on such a night there would be few people about. Therefore, if it was to be assumed that he had done so, it argued a state of mind bordering on insanity, and an aimlessness of object that might lead him anywhere; though, had he gone to the village, all the chances were that he would have been known. "Anywhere," as I express it, was a very wide margin. It really meant to any point of the compass avoiding the village. There was the high road and by-lanes, and footpaths through the woods and over the meadows and hills, and on a bitter winter night all these thoroughfares would be lonely and deserted. Supposing he had avoided the ordinary routes, he must have gone over the country the way the crow flies, that is, over hedges and ditches. It will thus be seen that, having regard to the deep snow, it was by no means easy to make even a vague guess as to the place in which

his body would probably be found, supposing that the theory of his being dead should prove correct. In face of the difficulties that confronted me, it suddenly occurred to me to call to my aid the intelligence of one of Mr. Champel's canine friends. He was very fond of animals, and amongst his pets was a magnificent specimen of a pure-bred St. Bernard, called "Monk." It was a really splendid animal. Not one of the hybrid mongrels which people who know no better call "long-haired St. Bernards," and in which the chief characteristics—namely, high intelligence, scent, and gentleness—are blunted or partially destroyed; but a smooth-coated beast, powerful as a young lion, though under thirty inches in height, but with a nose as keen as an antelope's. The man whose special duty it was to look after the dogs agreed to go with me, as Monk and I were strangers; so the handsome dog was loosed, and the three of us set off together. Somehow I could not help thinking that the dog by some subtle instinct divined the nature of the duty he was to perform, for he took the lead from the very first, and I resolved that he should go wherever he thought proper, and I would follow, no matter where he led.

For a little time his course was a very divergent one: now to the right, now to the left; then forward, next back the way we had come. Sometimes he rolled in the snow, then he sniffed the air with his noble head upraised, and anon he rushed along with his nose close to the ground. He continued this erratic performance for at least an hour, and we had not yet left the Manor grounds. At last he uttered a strange, plaintive whine, and with his nose to the ground he dashed off in a straight line. My companion and I followed, and we found the dog was traversing a little pathway, now

covered with snow, that led down into a hollow, where in a moss-covered boundary wall was a door, which, to my companion's astonishment, was standing open. I say he was astonished, because the door was invariably kept locked. On the other side of the wall was a deep and broad ditch, and the ditch was crossed by a double plank bridge leading from the door to the bank on the opposite side, which was a dense wood and game preserve, forming part of the Manor estate.

Across the little bridge the dog rushed with, as I felt certain, some fixed purpose in his mind. The snow was pretty deep, and he sank into it, but we followed, and he led us into the heart of the wood, where there was a hut used in the summer as a summer-house. The door of this house was also open, which drew from my companion another exclamation of surprise. The dog tore into the house, and immediately set up a violent howling. In a few moments we, too, had entered, and there on the floor lay the dead body of Mr. Champel, and the faithful and distressed hound was licking the cold, ghastly face, and trying in its dumb distress to warm it into life again.

My first thought was to determine if possible how the unfortunate gentleman had come by his death, and stooping down for that purpose, I was horrified to find he was lying in a pool of congealed blood. Naturally the first idea that suggested itself was suicide. I soon found that he had been shot in the breast on the right-hand side, pretty low down. That at least did not look like self-slaughter. A man who kills himself by shooting usually fires into his mouth, or else at his temple or his heart. I at once searched the hut for the weapon with which the deed had been done, but no weapon could be found. That didn't confirm the idea of

suicide either. Of course he might have shot himself outside, have dropped the weapon, and struggled into the hut to die. I confess, however, that it did seem to me very like a case of murder, for I could not understand a man shooting himself in the right side, which was likely to produce a lingering death. Men who decide to take their lives usually choose the most expeditious means of doing so. With the greatest difficulty we managed to get the dog away from the body. Then we closed the door, went sorrowfully back to the house, and I immediately had an interview with Sir Villiers Tremlin, to whom I imparted the sad news. I need scarcely say he was greatly shocked, and we at once decided that the guests should be dismissed, information given to the police, a search made for the weapon, and a request sent immediately to the family doctor to come up and examine the body.

In a very short time excitement, confusion, and lamentation prevailed where but a few hours ago there had been revelry and mirth. The coachman drove over for the doctor and brought him back, and he and I, Sir Villiers, and two servants carrying spades, proceeded at once to the hut. The doctor's examination revealed the fact that Mr. Champel had met his death by a bullet that had passed clean through the lower lobe of the right lung, and had come out at the back near the shoulder. And this bullet must have been fired from a distance, because there was not the slightest trace of burning of the clothes, which would necessarily have been the case if the weapon had been placed close to the body.

It was murder, not suicide; of that I was convinced; and there could be no doubt on the subject when, after two hours of patient labour and search, no trace of the weapon could be found. The doctor stated positively

that from the nature of the wound the unfortunate gentleman could not have remained in an upright position for five minutes after receiving it, and probably was stone dead within ten minutes from internal hæmorrhage. Consequently, if he had shot himself outside, he must have been very close to the hut at the time; and therefore, if it had been a case of suicide, the weapon would surely have been found within a short distance.

The coroner's inquest that followed brought nothing to light, but it strengthened the theory of murder. For though it was proved that on the day of his disappearance Mr. Champel was depressed, the evidence made it clear that he had no financial trouble of any kind. His affairs were flourishing, and, so far as could be gathered, there was no earthly reason for his taking his own life. The verdict, however, was an open one. It recorded that there was no evidence to prove how Mr. Champel had come by his death.

In the meantime I had caused the most exhaustive search to be made for the weapon that killed him. It was not forthcoming, however. But in the hut, deeply embedded in the wooden wall opposite the door, I found a bullet. It was not a pistol bullet, but a conical bullet from a gun cartridge. In a subsequent interview I had with Sir Villiers Tremlin, he made it manifest that he strongly inclined to the theory of suicide, but I said to him, "Sir Villiers this is no suicide, but murder, though at present I can suggest no theory for the murder. Mr. Champel, however, probably had a skeleton in his cupboard of which you knew nothing, intimate as you were with him. Let us search for that skeleton, and if our search is successful, it may put us on the track of the murderer."

Although he did not agree altogether with my views, he promised to place himself in my hands and help me in every way. Up to this time I had not seen Mrs. Champel. She had been so overwhelmed that she had kept her bed. But now I resolved to see her, and sent word asking her to grant me an interview.

A little later she received me in her elegant boudoir. She was very pale, and seemed strangely agitated and confused, and exhibited a striking reluctance to answer my questions, as though in her own mind she resented them as impertinences. She was a singularly handsome woman, with a typical Spanish face, dark olive skin, intensely dark eyes, in which slumbered the fierce fires of passion; and her hair, of which she had a great abundance, was of that magnificent blue-black hue peculiar to Southern Spanish women. Although she had been in England the greater part of her life, she yet spoke with a slightly foreign accent.

Notwithstanding her undeniable physical beauty, there was something in her nature that repelled me. She displayed a lofty scorn in her expression and a general indication of heartlessness. And I at once gauged her as being a woman capable of two violent extremes of temperament; that is, of intense passion on the one hand, which in her case might do duty for love, and of bitter and relentless hatred on the other. I mention these details as showing the impression she made on me before I had been in her company ten minutes.

Although she tried hard to conceal the fact, it cropped up in spite of her and made itself manifest that her husband had been distasteful to her. She spoke of him in a manner that amazed me, considering how recently she had become a widow, and the dreadful and

mysterious end that had so suddenly overtaken him. And at last I put this question to her, asking it with a certain sharpness—

"Mrs. Champel, tell me if there was any serious difference between you and your husband?"

As she answered she showed her white, even teeth, and they were clenched, and the slumbering fire of her eyes seemed to leap into activity for a moment.

"He was jealous of me," she said sibilantly.

"Jealous! Indeed! Had he cause to be so?"

"No!" she exclaimed almost fiercely; then with an exhibition of nervous excitement, and a scornful curling of her shapely lips, she added, "I will answer you no more questions. You have no business to ask me what there was between me and my husband. His dead lips will just as soon tell you as I will. Go, please. I will not be questioned."

She rose, and swept imperiously out of the room. This sudden but unpremeditated display of her inner nature to me did for the moment astonish me; but only for a moment. I, too, left the room, and seeking Sir Villiers Tremlin, said to him—

"Sir Villiers, I have discovered the skeleton."

"What do you mean?" he asked excitedly.

"I told you that Mr. Champel probably had a skeleton. I was correct. I have found it. Its name is jealousy."

"Good God!" he cried, "is that so? Now, then, that explains many little things I have noticed of late in Mr. Champel's manner: his furtive glances at his wife, his growing distress of mind, and his unusual restlessness. Yes, now it is explained. He was jealous. He was passionately attached to her,

worshipped the very ground she walked upon; and he was too true a gentleman to breathe a syllable against her until he was sure of his ground. And, intimate as I was with him, he told me nothing."

"Can you suggest any one of whom he had the slightest reason to be jealous?" I asked.

"Yes."

"His name?"

"Raymond Remmington, the handsome, scapegrace son of old Remmington, the retired shipbuilder, who lives over there in Welton Hall, the other side of the village."

"Why do you think Mr. Champel was jealous of Remmington?"

"Because Mrs. Champel showed a partiality for him. She rode with him, and drove with him, and was evidently fond of his company."

This information gave me food for reflection, and with the assistance of Sir Villiers, who under Champel's will was one of the executors, I was enabled to go through some of the deceased man's papers. But I discovered nothing that was of the slightest use in helping to unravel the mystery. While glancing about his study, however, I noted in the fireplace, on the hearthstone, the carbonized remains of a piece of paper. That was suggestive of a burnt letter. Ever on the *qui vive* for signs and clues, I picked this up, and noted traces of letters in the burnt surface. As every one knows, if you burn a sheet of paper with writing or print on it, and do not thoroughly destroy but only carbonize it, the writing or parts of it may still be read. So it was in this case. With greatest care and most delicate handling I placed that charred substance on a large sheet of white

paper, and by aid of a magnifying glass deciphered the following words—

be hut in wood
wife assignation

This was all that had any coherency. There were other strokes and two or three letters visible, but no meaning could be made out of them. The foregoing words, however, had a startling significance, and the theory I constructed was this: Mr. Champel had received a note saying that his wife had an assignation at the hut in the wood. But that note was simply to lure him to his doom. He went to the hut, and was there shot by some one lying in concealment. Possibly he was killed immediately on crossing the little bridge, and his body was carried into the hut to foster the idea of suicide. But the cunning of the murderer had overreached itself, for he neglected to leave a weapon by the body, and no weapon was ever found. Now came the crucial question, Who wrote the letter and who shot him? Was it one and the same person, or two individuals? I showed Sir Villiers the burnt paper, but unfortunately it was impossible to preserve it. The tinder crumbled away.

My next step was silently, and as secretly as possible, to learn all I could in connection with Raymond Remmington. He had led a graceless and shameless career, and given his friends and relatives much concern. That he had been about a great deal with Mrs. Champel there was no doubt, but it was generally supposed that this was with the knowledge of the husband, for he was a frequent visitor at the Manor, and it was understood—or inferred, at any rate—that he was Mr. Champel's friend. He had received an invita-

tion for the party at the Manor on New Year's Eve, but could not accept it as he was suffering from quinsy, and was confined to his bed, with a professional nurse to attend to him. That he was not out on that night, nor for several days before, nor several days after, I placed beyond question by the most undeniable testimony. Therefore his hand was not the hand that actually committed the crime.

For weeks I tried by every means in my power to solve this strange problem, but failed—not a trace of the murderer could be got. It was a somewhat singular thing that the prevailing opinion was that Mr. Champel had committed suicide, though there was not one atom of evidence to support that idea. It was murder; I felt convinced it was murder; but for once I was baffled.

A little more than a year after Champel's death his widow became the wife of Raymond Remmington. Champel had left her everything by his will, and she hastened to sell all the property and went to Spain with her new lord, settling at last in Madrid. Two years later the English papers announced that "An Englishman named Raymond Remmington, who married the widow of Mr. Champel, whose mysterious death at Marfield will be fresh in the memory of the public, was recently assassinated in Madrid, where he resided with his wife. It appears that he was returning home late at night from a *café* where he had been spending the evening, when he lost his life. How or why he was killed is not known, but his body was found by a soldier lying in a lonely street, and when it was examined it was found to be punctured by five dagger wounds, each of which in itself was sufficient to cause death. Robbery does not seem to have been the motive for the crime, as his valuables and money were intact."

On reading this I took considerable trouble to get hold of any further particulars that might be forthcoming, but all I could learn was that he and his wife led a very unhappy life owing to differences about money matters. He had taken to drink heavily, and would have run through her fortune had she allowed him to have control of it.

As an assassination in Spain by stabbing is by no means a rare occurrence, Remmington's death did not attract any particular attention, and the authorities gave themselves no very great trouble—he being a foreigner—to discover the murderer; so his death went unavenged. Thus the mystery surrounding his end might be said to be a sequel to the Marfield Mystery, which, until the grave reveals its secrets, will probably never be solved. But the following strange fact may help the reader to form his own theory. Upwards of ten years after Mr. Champel's death, the then owner of the Manor estate was making a new pathway through the wood, when the workmen dug up an old, worm-eaten, and rusty gun. A notification of this was sent to me, and I subjected that relic to a critical examination. The bullet that I had taken from the woodwork of the hut I still had in my possession, and experts declared that the bullet, although flattened and out of shape, had fitted in the bore of the gun. On the stock of this gun were carved the initials "J. B." They were the initials of a man named Jack Burton, who formerly lived in Marfield, and rendered himself somewhat notorious owing to his drinking habits and his love of poaching. Almost immediately after the murder he left the village, much to the astonishment of his acquaintances, and went to America. The questions therefore that arise to one's mind, and which require answering, are:

First—Did Jack Burton shoot Mr. Champel?

Second—If so, was he instigated to the deed by Raymond Remmington?

Third—Was Mrs. Champel a party to the crime?

Interested as I have always been in this extraordinary drama of real life, I tried to keep Mrs. Remmington in view, and I found that she died some years ago at Florence, having married for the third time. Her lips therefore, and the lips of Raymond Remmington, are sealed with the eternal silence of the grave. Of Jack Burton I have never been able to get a trace. He may or may not be living. But it seems highly probable after this lapse of time that the dark mystery of dear, old, delightful, dreamy Marfield will remain a mystery until the end of all things.

FOILED.

A DARK CHAPTER FROM A STRANGE HISTORY.

About a mile and a half off the main road between Edinburgh and Berwick, and nearly equi-distant between the two towns, stood a large farmhouse known in the district as "The Sea Wash." It was situated in a most lonely part of the country, in a deep hollow that sloped somewhat like a section of a funnel down to the sea. In bad weather the flying spume from the angry ocean was often driven by the wind far over the farm lands, hence—no doubt, the place came to be called "Sea Wash." It was in every way appropriate, for it was a terribly bleak spot, particularly so in winter, and the wonder was that anything grew there. At least a stranger would have wondered, but, as a matter of fact, the land for miles round, where not actually exposed to the full blasts from the German Ocean, was astonishingly fertile in a general way, and some of the finest crops of potatoes and turnips to be found in all the country were raised there, while Sea Wash hay had a reputation far and near. These results were doubtless due to the rich quality of the land, and to the large amount of sunlight during an average summer. It was, however, as a cattle and horse breeding farm that it was most valuable, and in this respect few places either north or south could outrival it.

Sea Wash had been in the same family for nearly, if not quite, two generations, and it was due to the enterprise and energy of this family that the place had

become as valuable as it was. The family bore the name of Lammington. They came of a stock of sturdy Westmoreland yeomen, who traced their ancestry back to pre-Norman times; and they also made a boast that when the weak and pusillanimous Edward II. led his splendid but shamefully-managed army to the disastrous field of Bannockburn, many of the Lammingtons marched in the van, and rendered true yeoman service, for which their descendants received grants of land.

Sea Wash came to the family by purchase; the original owner bearing the name being Harold Lammington, who, so to speak, reeked of the soil. He was a young man with a young wife. Up to this time the farm had not prospered, but under his energetic management its luck changed for the better, until it was looked upon as a splendid property. The story I have to tell is connected with some of his descendants.

At the period of the story the farm was in the occupation of his grandson, John Herschel Lammington, who had a numerous family, some of whom were settled in far distant parts of the world. His eldest son had died young, from the effects of an accident in the hunting field; and his second son, Percy Robert, had been a source of grievous trouble to his parents and all connected with him. In his case his father had conceived what proved to be the fatal project of bringing him up to some genteel profession, instead of allowing him to follow the agricultural and country pursuits which his people had followed for so many years. So it was decided that Percy should enter the Church, and he was sent to Aberdeen to pursue his studies. But in a very short time he expressed a strong dislike for the calling of a minister, and thought he would like the

Law. He was therefore removed to Edinburgh, and entered as a law student, though it was speedily made manifest that the bent of his mind did not incline to the legal world. In fact, it was said by those who had to deal with him that he was lacking in application and had a strong tendency to run wild. Of course his parents were not only greatly disappointed, but much distressed, and they had him home again. Unhappily, however, his experience, brief as it had been, of town life had unsettled him, and farm work had no attractions. He now expressed a wish to learn engineering, and accordingly his father determined to give him another chance. He was consequently taken to London and placed with one of the most eminent firms in the Metropolis, and it was now thought that he had found his proper groove. But the fatal fascinations of the great world of London were too much for such an ill-balanced mind as this young man had, and it became very painfully apparent that he was not likely to do much good for himself. Indeed, there is not the slightest doubt that he plunged into a vortex of dissipation, but his evil doings were for a long time kept from his parents' ears by his youngest sister Bessie, with whom he was a great favourite. Bessie was his junior, but in every sense of the word she was as superior to him as one human being could well be to another.

Bessie's love for the black sheep caused her to look upon his vices as venial ones, and she prevented them coming to his father's knowledge until it was too late. He had so seriously disgraced himself with the firm he had been placed with that they summarily got rid of him, and wrote to his father informing him; but poor Bessie, under the mistaken impression that she was

serving her brother, purloined that letter, so that it never came into her father's hands.

For a whole year after this he seems to have loafed about the Metropolis, supported chiefly, as was subsequently ascertained, by means of small remittances sent to him by his sister Bessie. Then a terrible event happened that fell upon the family with the shock of an earthquake. In a low lodging in the South of London there was a tragedy one night. A young married woman quarrelled with her husband, and made a furious attack upon him with the poker. They had both been drinking heavily for some days, and at the time of the occurrence they were hardly responsible for their actions. In order to avoid her he rushed out of the room, and down a long flight of stairs. She followed, but pitched headlong down the stairs and broke her neck. This man and woman had been known as Mr. and Mrs. Lindsay, and she was supposed to be an actress. It came out in the evidence, however, when the inquest was held, that the man's real name was Percy Lammington. His wife had been a fourth-rate ballet dancer at Drury Lane Theatre, and subsequently took to singing in low-class music halls. But she drank so that she could never keep an engagement, and the ill-sorted pair led a cat-and-dog life. They had been married twelve months, during which it was difficult to tell how they had lived. Of course, Lammington was acquitted of any actual complicity in his wife's death. It can well be conceived, however, how the revelation made at the inquest affected his family. Not even his sister knew of the marriage, nor of the wretched and debased life her brother was leading.

The effect on Mr. Lammington was heartrending.

It almost seemed for a time as if he would lose his reason. He, as his ancestors had been, was very proud of the family name, and to have it disgraced thus by an ingrate and a vagabond was terrible. When the old man, however, had cooled down, he felt that something must be done to try and reclaim his shameless son, so he went up to London to see him. The meeting between them was very painful, at least it was for Mr. Lammington, but it is said that Percy showed signs of contrition, and declared that he would go abroad if his father would give him an outfit and some money. This his father consented to do, and he arranged to allow him a small quarterly allowance, besides paying his passage to America. In due course Percy departed, and for a year or more nothing was heard of him. At last news reached his family that he was undergoing a term of imprisonment in Washington for forgery.

It was surely excusable if, under the infliction of this new disgrace, his parents expressed the wish that he were dead, for it seemed pretty evident now that he was irreclaimable, and would never do any good for himself or any one belonging to him. About six months later, towards the close of the day, to the surprise, and even horror, of all the family, this reprobate son presented himself at Sea Wash Farm. He had so altered that they scarcely knew him. His hair had blanched, his eyes were sunken, his face haggard and pale, and he had every appearance of having suffered considerably.

Mr. Lammington's first impulse was to turn him from the door, and bid him sternly never to darken it again. But Bessie came to his aid. After all, he was her brother, and blood is thicker than water. She pleaded for him, and so did his mother; for though she had been very angry against him, his obvious misery

and suffering now touched her maternal heart, so she backed up Bessie's earnest prayer to her father that he might be allowed to remain, and as Percy shed copious tears and vowed reformation, the much-tried and long-suffering father yielded, and he consented to the young man remaining. To this concession, however, a condition was attached. Percy was only to remain for a week or two until he got into better health, and his presence there was to be kept a profound secret. At the end of the time he was to go abroad again, and his father made a provisional promise that he would once more, but for the last time, set him up in money and clothes.

For three weeks Percy seems to have exhibited a repentant demeanour, and gave the most abject signs of contrition. His sister bestowed upon him the same affection as of old, and prayed with him and for him, and exhorted him fervently in the name of all that was sacred to desert his evil ways, and try by a future life of honesty and industry to blot out the bitter record of the past. In this attempt to find his better nature she was ably seconded by her mother, and hopes began to be entertained that the prodigal was reclaimed. But as it is impossible to take the spots off the leopard, so is it impossible to soften the heart that is thoroughly hardened by a long course of wickedness.

One morning when the household rose Percy Lammington had disappeared. He had got away some time during the night, and in addition to a large sum of money, he carried off jewellery of various kinds, and a number of antique and very valuable coins and rings, which were kept in a cabinet in the drawing-room.

The old man was furious, nor was it to be wondered at, and his wife and daughter were scarcely less angry.

Such base ingratitude was more than human flesh and blood could stand. I was called upon the scene by the outraged father, who declared he would be pitiless, and I was instructed to use every possible means to track the criminal down.

"In the event of his being captured," exclaimed the old man, "his villainous record shall be known in order that he may receive sentence of a long term of penal servitude, and, before his time expires, I hope that God Almighty will see fit to take him. It is a hard thing for a father to say of his son, but this villain has turned my hair grey and broken my heart. While he lives he will be a nightmare to me; his death alone can release me from the incubus."

I could hardly help indicating that I was in accord with the sentiments expressed. At the same time I ventured to hint—from what they told me of Percy's career—that he was probably hardly responsible for his actions, and in reality suffered from an uncontrollable mania.

The old man, however, would not assent to this, and the bitter terms in which he spoke of him showed how thoroughly turned he was against his strangely constituted son, who, he avowed, was unlike any Lammington who had ever lived.

"You must run him down, Donovan," were Mr. Lammington's parting words to me; "and when you have got him I will strain the law against him to its fullest possible extent. Inside the walls of a gaol is the proper place for him, and he will then be forgotten by the world."

As I set out on my quest I could not restrain a feeling of intense sympathy for this most unhappy father, whose life had been darkened and his peace on earth

destroyed by a son whose nature was so vile that he was repulsive. As for his reclamation, I did not think that possible after this, the latest exhibition of his ingratitude and baseness. It was, therefore, better, as the father had said, that he should become dead to the world by being immured between prison walls.

I found that he had proceeded to Berwick Station, and there got an early train, which only went as far as Newcastle. Of course, there was nothing whatever to determine whether he intended to remain in Newcastle or go on. My own feeling was that his destination was London. His profligate career had practically commenced in London, and the Metropolis seemed to have a fascination for him. My first stage, however, was Newcastle; and, arrived there, I prosecuted my inquiries. As every one knows, Newcastle is a large place, and to search for any particular individual in the town, unless you have some clue to go upon, is like looking for a mustard seed in a haystack. But I did not despair, and I went to work resolutely. Fortune favoured me in a strange way.

There had been a row in the station soon after the arrival of the Edinburgh train on the morning of Percy's departure. That train was the train he travelled by. Some cardsharpers had also travelled by it, and a young man complained to the inspector that they had robbed him. In turn, they accused the young man of trying to rob them, and denounced him as a professional thief, whereupon there was a great row, and a free fight was only prevented by the tact of the officials, who seemed to incline to the belief that if there was a victim at all in the case, it was the young man. His description in every way answered that of Percy Lammington, and it was ascertained that he had

travelled from Berwick. As they were informed that the cardsharpers had threatened to do him bodily injury, the inspector deemed it prudent to retain him, as he seemed rather strange in his manner. He could not make up his mind where he would go to, but at noon, as there happened to be a train going on to Sunderland, he decided to go there, and thither I went also. It happened to be Saturday when I arrived, and once more chance favoured me in a very peculiar way.

I put myself in communication with the local police, who promised to aid me all they could, and about eleven o'clock that night I received information that a man had been brought into one of the stations in a state of absolute unconsciousness through drink. His description answered the man I was seeking; moreover, a considerable amount of jewellery was found on his person, together with some antique coins, which left no doubt as to his identity. I went down to the station at once, and recognized in the unconscious man the undutiful son, Percy Lammington.

Of course, being Saturday night, nothing could be done, and he was left to sleep off the effects of his carouse, all unconscious of the fate in store for him. In the meantime I telegraphed to Mr. Lammington; for, knowing how he and his family had suffered through this dreadful reprobate, I thought that, having cooled down, possibly he would prefer to send the fellow out of the country rather than endure the painful publicity that would necessarily be given to the pitiable story. But the old man was evidently inflexible, for he telegraphed back that there would be no leniency shown, and that he would be in Sunderland on Monday morning.

Accordingly, when Monday morning came, Mr.

Lammington arrived, identified his son, and duly charged him with the theft. Percy Lammington, when he realized the situation, became sullen and wolfish-looking, and when confronted with his father he said menacingly—

"Don't appear against me. Take my advice and don't, or if you do it will cost you dear."

This threat, as was only natural, irritated Mr. Lammington still more, and strengthened his resolve to go on with the prosecution, so the wretched young man was brought up before the magistrate, and remanded. Subsequently he was removed to Berwick, and from thence committed to the Assizes at Carlisle, where he was tried, and in view of his black record and the bad character his unhappy father gave him, he was sentenced to ten years' penal servitude. As he was leaving the dock he looked to where his grey-headed parent was seated, and, shaking his fist at him, murmured—

"This seals your death-doom."

No notice was taken of the threat, and every one who knew the heartrending story sympathized with poor Mr. Lammington, and congratulated him on being rid of so unnatural a son.

Two years passed, and it was known to the family that Percy had shown signs of dementia soon after his conviction, and that it had been necessary to remove him to a lunatic asylum, where his madness became so acute that he had to be confined in a strait jacket, and kept in a padded room. Six or seven months later the acute stage seemed to abate; but his one uttered thought, his one dream, was to be "revenged" on his father, as he expressed it. Very frequently he would pause in whatever he was doing, and into his haggard, wild-looking face would come an expression of ferocity,

and, raising both hands towards heaven, he would vow a vow that he would kill his father. Sometimes he got so excited that he would have a fit, and when he was restored he would lie on a bed helpless for a day or two.

It was a terribly sad case—a case that wrung the heart of all who knew the story of the wretched being's life. Of course, no one ever dreamed for a moment that he would ever have the chance of putting his horrible threat into execution. On the other hand, no one doubted that if by any possible means the chance did arise, the threat would be carried out, and amongst his many other crimes he would number that of parricide.

One day he was suddenly missed. He had been digging up potatoes in a patch of ground in company with a fellow-sufferer, and both of them were under the eye of a warder. The warder had occasion to go away for a few minutes, and when he came back Lammington was nowhere to be seen. A search was made, but he was not discovered, and it became only too evident he had effected his escape, and the means he had adopted were soon made evident. He had climbed a large tree that grew against a wall fifteen feet high. From the extreme end of a branch of the tree he had made a most daring leap on to the top of the wall. Thence he had dropped into a ditch on the other side, his footmarks being plainly visible. He must also have injured himself, for there were marks of blood on the ground. From that ditch all traces of him were lost, and the attendants, bearing in mind his oft-repeated threat, deemed it wise to put Mr. Lammington on his guard, and they telegraphed to him. On receipt of that telegram he at once telegraphed on to me at Edinburgh,

and I lost no time in going down. By the time I had arrived they had received a letter containing further particulars, and cautioning him that it was necessary to be on his guard, for the lunatic was likely to seek means to gratify his mania.

It can easily be imagined the distressed state in which all the members of the family were, and Bessie and Mrs. Lammington urged me to set off at once and endeavour to track the madman down. In reply, I expressed an opinion that I was far better where I was.

For two nights I kept watch and ward outside the house. On the third, about one o'clock in the morning, I saw a figure steal up from a copse, and prowl round the house, examining the windows and doors. I had no difficulty in recognizing Percy. There was a good deal of light from the veiled moon, the night being cloudy, but the moon was nearly at its full, and the wretched man as he slunk round looked ghastly and weird. He did not see me, for I was in concealment, and presently he crept away to a large haystack about twenty yards off. Then very cautiously I made my way to the men's quarters, and aroused them, asking them to place themselves under my guidance. Then, with the utmost circumspection, we spread ourselves out in what might roughly be described as a circle, that gradually contracted and decreased in circumference until we were close on the haystack, when, at a signal from me, a rush was made. At first we saw nothing of the madman, but presently I detected that the hay had been disturbed near one corner of the stack, and I found that he had scooped out a large hollow, into which he had crept, and there we found him coiled up and asleep. Before he was able to offer any resistance, we had

seized and bound him, but when he did realize that he was captured his fury was indescribable, and six strong men found a difficulty in holding him down.

On his person was found an ordinary table-knife, but the blade had been ground down until it resembled a dagger, and round the sharpened edge and point he had wound a long strip of his shirt in order that he might suffer no injury himself from the weapon. As soon as possible, news of his capture was telegraphed to the authorities, and he was conveyed back to his place of detention. He had been foiled in his diabolical attempt to commit murder, and when his paroxysm of rage had passed he fell into a pitiably weak condition, and his brain seemed to be entirely shattered. In this condition he lingered for about three months, and then the Angel of Death mercifully closed his earthly record, much to the relief of his long-suffering family.

THE STORY OF BILLY THE BAGMAN.

Those who are old enough to carry their memories back for about a quarter of a century will remember the sensation that was caused in Glasgow, and, indeed, all over the country, by the discovery of the body of a young woman in a cask that had been lying at one of the railway stations. The cask had been received a day or two before, and was consigned to "Messrs. Lidwell & Tonkins, Liverpool. To be kept till called for." The cask was about to be placed upon a truck with other goods that were to be sent on that night to the south, when something arrested the attention of one of the workmen, who, having satisfied himself that the cask was not filled with legitimate merchandise, reported his suspicions to the inspector of the goods depôt, who, after consulting with his superior, ordered the cask to be opened. Then, to the amazement and horror of every one around, it was seen that a human body had been pressed into the cask, and the interstices had then been filled up with sawdust.

As the railway company was not in the habit of receiving such ghastly consignments as this, and as it seemed clear that there was matter for police inquiry, no time was lost in sending information to the chief office, and I was at once instructed to go down to the railway station and make all the necessary inquiries, with a view to elucidating the mystery. On making inquiries I found that the top of the cask only had been removed, and this revealed the crown of a human head—

a woman's, obviously, by the hair; and so, before proceeding to disturb the contents of the cask any further, I sent for the police surgeon, who lost no time in attending. Then we had the sawdust carefully removed, and we brought to light the trunk of a woman apparently about thirty years of age. The body was not entire, as the legs had been cut off from above the knees. The severance of the limbs showed considerable skill, the flesh having been cleanly cut, and the bones then sawn through. Nevertheless, it was pretty clear that the operator had been an amateur in the art of anatomy, though as an amateur he had done very well. The limbs had evidently been taken off, in order to get the trunk into the cask, and as they were not there with the body they must have been got rid of in some other way.

An examination of the remains revealed that the poor creature had died of suffocation, probably by having something held over the mouth and nostrils. The autopsy also made it plain that the woman had drunk pretty heavily, and the theory set up was that she had been suffocated while in a drunken sleep.

It now seemed clear that we had a case of mysterious murder to deal with, and I at once set to work to try and bring all the facts to light. As there was not a vestige of clothing on the body, we had nothing likely to give us a clue in that respect. The hands furnished evidence that the murdered woman had belonged to the working class, for they were rough and horny; but she had been in possession of fairly good looks. Her hair, somewhat scant, was reddish, the eyes blue, and the mouth rather well shaped, though the teeth were irregular. She had also worn earrings, as the marks were there, as well as a ring on the wedding finger, also

evidenced by the mark, though it is, perhaps, needless to say the articles of jewellery were missing.

The cask containing these remains of poor mortality had been received two days previous to the discovery, and had been brought to the station by a man, who had wheeled it on a handcart, and stated he was in the employ of a Mr. Johnston, a plaster of Paris mould-maker, who carried on his business in the south side of the town, and he described the cask as being filled with plaster moulds. Having prepaid the carriage to Liverpool, and got a receipt for his money, he went his way, and so far all trace of him was lost.

It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to state that no such firm as "Lidwell & Tonkins," of Liverpool, was in existence; but, strangely enough, a Mr. Johnston was discovered, who carried on the business of a plaster mould-maker, and he was very much shocked when he heard that his name had been associated with the ghastly business. Of course, it became necessary to make some inquiries about him, but it was established beyond doubt that he was a highly respectable man, and knew nothing whatever about the cask and its grim contents. The fact of his name having been mentioned, however, seemed to me to be likely to lead to a clue being obtained; for it was certainly remarkable that his name should have been used, and it suggested that the criminal knew him, and had probably been in his employ at one time. However, all inquiry failed to bring forth any fact that would establish this. Nevertheless, I could not divest my mind of the idea that the using of Mr. Johnston's name had not been done merely at random, but resulted from some knowledge of Johnston on the part of the criminal. I therefore pursued my investigations on that assumption, and personally interviewed

every soul in Johnston's service. Amongst them was a young woman known as Alice Graham. She was about twenty, and had been in his employ from the time she was ten years old. It came out in the course of an inquiry I had with her that her father had followed the occupation of a sailor, and was supposed to have been lost at sea. She was then a little girl, and soon afterwards her mother left her and a younger brother to the tender mercies of the world. They were, however, taken care of by an aunt, though soon afterwards her brother died.

For some years Alice heard nothing of her mother, but one day a letter was brought to her by a man who waited for an answer. The letter was from her mother, though it gave no address. It stated that the writer was very ill, and in a dreadful state of poverty, and she begged her daughter to send her some money. The poor girl by hard scraping and a rigid practising of self-denial had saved a matter of ten pounds, and she was weak enough to go home, get five pounds of her hard-earned savings, and entrust the amount to the man for delivery to her mother. She expressed a wish to see her mother, and the man promised that he would return and take her to see her, but, of course, he never came back again.

Now, these incidents were common enough under ordinary circumstances, and might be said to represent an every-day story; but to me they had a significance that I could not ignore, and the more I pondered over them, the more I seemed to discern in them the thread of a clue that would ultimately lead to the unravelling of the mystery.

I questioned Alice closely as to what she remembered of her mother, and her memory was a blank on the

subject, for she was so young when the mother went away; but when I came to inquire about the man, she gave proof that she had shrewd powers of observation, for she was enabled to describe him to me as a short, thick-set man, who had the look of a foreigner. He was swarthy of complexion, had intensely dark eyes and hair, and a black moustache and beard; and, what was of great importance to me, she spoke to his wearing small rings in his ears. He had big, strong-looking hands, and wore three or four "brass rings" on his fingers. I asked her why she concluded they were brass rings, and her answer was she was sure they were not gold, because they didn't look like it. This was not a very substantial reason, nor was the matter of much consequence, but I mention it as illustrating her powers of observation.

It will be seen from the descriptive portrait she drew out of the man that he represented a somewhat conspicuous type in that part of the country, and I resolved, if it were at all possible, to find him out; for though there was the possibility, even probability, that I was on the wrong track, it was equally possible I was on the right one, and it was highly important that no chance should be lost.

The fact of the man wearing earrings suggested very strongly that Alice Graham was right when she said that he was likely enough a foreigner; and on the assumption that he was an alien, I conducted my investigations in quarters where I was likely to hear something about the fellow I wanted. At first I did not meet with much to encourage me, until one night I was at one of the music halls of the great city. Business had taken me there, as I was on the look-out for a noted pickpocket, and I had reason to think he

frequented that hall. During the evening a topical song was sung on the stage, and in it the singer made allusion to the crime that had caused so much sensation, and about which every one was talking. At its conclusion I heard a woman, who was sitting amongst the audience, remark in Italian to another woman—

"The police will have pretty hard work now to catch the criminal, I should think; for, unless he's a fool, he will have made good his escape long before this."

A little while later I got into conversation with these women, and talking to them in Italian I alluded to the crime that had made so much stir. I found that they had been long in residence in the town; one kept a small confectioner's shop, and the other sold plaster casts. They did not know me, and being glad to meet with some one who spoke their language, they chatted very freely, and presently I drew a word portrait of the man who had gone to Alice Graham for the money, and then I inquired if they had ever known any one who would answer to that description. At first they looked at each other in a surprised sort of way, and presently one said to her neighbour—

"Why, that is like Ferdinand Gonzales."

"Who is Ferdinand Gonzales?" I asked.

"Well, he is a Portuguese, but he was born in Liverpool."

"Does he live in Glasgow?"

"He did."

"But doesn't now?" I suggested, as she spoke in the past tense.

"Upon my word I don't know," answered the woman. "I haven't seen him for a long time."

"Are you interested in him?"

"Not a bit; except that he once borrowed a shilling from me and never paid me back."

"Was he well known as Ferdinand Gonzales?"

"Oh, no; he was always called Billy the Bagman."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed, feeling as if the scent was getting warm, for the fact of the women recognizing the portrait I had sketched in words, and of the man being a foreigner, though a naturalized Englishman, seemed clearly suggestive that I had struck a trail which might lead to important results. "Why was he called Billy the Bagman?" I inquired.

"Well, he was a sort of hawker, you know."

"What did he hawk?"

"Anything that he could sell."

"Do you know whether he was married?"

The question caused the women to laugh in a significant way, and one answered me thus—

"I should think Billy had as many wives as he had fingers and toes."

"But you know nothing for certain about his domestic affairs?"

"No."

"Did he travel about the country?"

"Oh, yes; he was always on the move."

"How long is it since you saw him?"

"Well, let me see now. I should say it was nearly six months."

"Did he make Glasgow his home?"

"Yes; as far as I know, he did."

"Do you know where he used to stay?"

"Yes; well—that is, I knew where he stayed at one time."

"Where was that?"

"Do you know Anderston's Quay?"

"I do."

"Very well. There is a street called Cheapside Street runs away up from it."

"There is," I remarked.

"And in it is Mulready's lodging-house, and Billy used to stay there."

"Now, can you give me one other piece of information?" I said. "Can you tell me if Billy the Bagman wore earrings when you knew him?"

"Yes, I am sure he did," was the answer.

This was a valuable link of evidence, and I had a strong feeling that at last I had got a clue, and in a strange and unexpected manner; for had I not been at the music hall, and had an allusion to the murder not been made by the singer of the topical song, which led to the remark on the part of the Italian woman, I should never have gained the information I had done.

Having thanked the women, I withdrew, acquainting myself first of all with their addresses in case I might wish to interview them again.

Of course I did not ignore that there were chances against Billy the Bagman being the murderer of the woman found in the cask at the railway station. But, on the other hand, it seemed extremely probable that he was, for such a concatenation of coincidences was not likely to occur in connection with one person. And the facts I had to deal with were these. The person who left the cask at the station said that he came from Johnston's, the plaster of Paris mould-maker. The trade followed by Johnston was not an ordinary one, and it was very remarkable that he should have been singled out, unless the guilty person had some

knowledge of him. What was that knowledge, and how was it derived? No one answering the description of Billy had ever been in Johnston's employ, so that his knowledge was not a personal one, and was therefore derived from somebody else. Was it not highly probable that the somebody else was Alice Graham's mother? The mother was aware, no doubt, that her daughter was employed at Johnston's works, and she gave the information to Billy. Subsequently she voluntarily, or else perhaps coerced by him to do so, wrote a note to her daughter begging for money, and that note was conveyed to the girl by a foreign-looking man who wore earrings. Now, I had learned that a man answering the description in every way was known to some Italian women in the town as a Portuguese, named Ferdinand Gonzales, born in Liverpool, and familiarly known as Billy the Bagman. Following out the argument, therefore, to its logical conclusion, was it not reasonable to suppose that the man who wheeled the cask to the station was Billy the Bagman, that his knowledge of Johnston's works was derived from his connection with the mother of Alice Graham, and that he had used the name of Johnston to give a plausible reason for his sending off the cask?

It was beyond all doubt that the person who took the cask to the station and left it there was well aware of its contents, and in saying it contained plaster of Paris moulds from Johnston's works, he was desirous that no suspicion should be raised. The doctor who examined the body of the woman said that she had been dead about three days, consequently she had not long been dead when placed in the cask. Now, if the discovery had not been made in Glasgow, but the package had been sent on to Liverpool, many days might have

passed before the truth as to the contents of the cask became known, and on this the criminal had no doubt relied, and laid his plans of escape accordingly. Calculating probably on having a full week to get clear, and as he was a foreigner, it was likely he had gone out of the country altogether.

After my conversation with the Italian women at the music hall, I had another interview with Alice Graham, and questioned her about the letter. She said it was fairly well written, and on my asking if her mother could write, she replied that she believed she was a very good writer. The girl had kept the letter for some time, but at last had either destroyed or lost it. By comparing the respective dates of Alice receiving the letter and the commission of the crime, I found that there was an interval of six months.

My next step was to go to Mulready's lodging-house. Mulready was an Irishman, and had kept the place for a number of years. There was nothing against him in the police records, and, considering the rough class of customers he had to do with, his house was considered to be conducted in a respectable way. He remembered Billy the Bagman very well, and he spoke of him as a very reticent and sullen sort of man. He travelled about the country buying and selling anything by which he could make money. On and off he had stayed at Mulready's house for a considerable time, but he never talked about his affairs in any way. He was given to drink, though when in his cups he was usually very jolly and good-tempered, and fond of practical jokes. Although very foreign in his looks and general appearance, and though he rather affected a foreign style of dress, he was not, in other respects, foreign in his tastes and habits, and, of course, spoke English

fluently, but with a suspicion of an accent, which, no doubt, he had acquired from his parents.

On one occasion he came to Mulready's in company with a woman, and the description Mulready gave of that woman tallied with the remains found in the cask. The couple only stayed at the lodging-house two days, and then left, and Mulready understood that they were going to Liverpool. That was about five months before the murder, and Mulready never saw them again.

So far, then, as I had proceeded in the disentanglement of the threads of this strange case, it seemed placed beyond question that Ferdinand Gonzales, *alias* Billy the Bagman, was the murderer, and almost equally certain that the murdered woman was Alice Graham's mother. That they did not leave Glasgow and go to Liverpool, as they gave Mulready to understand they intended to do, was evident, unless they went and came back again, for there was the fact that the crime had been committed in Glasgow; and the task that lay before me was to find out where it had been committed, where the murderer had gone to, and, if possible, lay my hands upon him, in order that he might be brought before a legal tribunal, and there answer for his wickedness. Although I deemed it highly probable I should discover the place of the crime, I was not so sanguine about arresting Billy, for he had got a good start, and if he had availed himself of his opportunities he had probably reached a safe hiding-place, and whether I should succeed in dragging him forth remained to be proved.

It goes, of course, without saying that I lost no time in circulating a full description of Billy the Bagman all over the country, and took such other means as were

open to me to prevent him leaving the country, if he had not already done so. But I confess that I was not very sanguine at that time of arresting him, though, on the other hand, unless he was well supplied with money, which was doubtful, he might not only be unable but reluctant to go away. However, that was a question for the future to decide, and in the meantime I concerned myself in endeavouring to bring to light the details of the murder, and with this end in view I went to Liverpool in the belief that, firstly, as Gonzales had told Mulready that he was going to Liverpool, and secondly, as he had consigned the cask to Liverpool, it was quite within the bounds of probability that he might have some connections there, especially as it was his native town.

Of course, if this was so, it would argue almost an incredible amount of stupidity on the fellow's part; but as I have urged over and over again, the detective who wishes to succeed in his calling must never forget that the cleverest of criminals generally betray themselves by some act that would almost disgrace a schoolboy. Probably Gonzales having an intimate acquaintance with Liverpool, it was the first place that suggested itself to him to consign the cask to, and he never paused to think that by so doing it would put the police on his scent. Liverpool is a large place in which to have to search for a man whose life depends on his hiding away. Nevertheless I was not discouraged; and being well acquainted with the great shipping town, I knew the likeliest quarters in which to direct my inquiries.

Billy being a hawker, it was feasible to suppose that he would frequent the haunts of hawkers, on the principle that birds of a feather flock together. I

therefore wended my way to a notorious quarter, not very far from Scotland Road. This region has for very many years borne a most unenviable reputation as the haunt of vice and crime. I ought perhaps rather to speak in the past tense, because since the day I wrote Scotland Road and all the slums connected with it have been very much improved. There is a better police supervision, and a good many of the nests of human vermin have been entirely cleared away. But even now Scotland Road, on a Saturday night particularly, is a place to be remembered.

In penetrating into the dark places of this pestilential Alsatia I did not suppose I should find Billy himself. Stupid I believed him to be, and stupid he no doubt was, but it was hardly likely he would be so idiotic as to seek shelter there when the hue and cry was so hot; for he must have known that Scotland Road and its neighbourhood was jealously watched by the police, and his description was so well circulated that he could hardly have hoped to escape one of the Argus eyes that were constantly turned on that particular part of the town. But what I did think was that I might strike a trail, that is, gather some hint, or be able to form a valuable inference from an unguarded and incautious utterance.

A very notorious haunt of vice in the neighbourhood was a public-house known as the "Three Bells." It was one of those places that we of this day wonder how they could have been allowed to exist. At the "Three Bells" the most villainous drink was sold to the most villainous people, and it was pitiable to note the young of both sexes elbowing their way to the dirty, greasy counter in their eagerness to obtain some of the body and soul destroying stuff that was sold there. Oft I

went to the "Three Bells," and my object in doing so may be readily guessed. Amongst the customers of that dreadful place—frequented as it was by a class of people whose trade or calling was crime—one was likely to pick up valuable scraps of information.

One day as I entered I noted that the police had caused to be hung up in the bar a full description of Billy the Bagman, and this placard gave me an opportunity of making the murder the subject of conversation before I had been there very long. The bar was crowded with people who might have been described as the scum of the earth. There was not a person there who did not seem to have the mint-mark of villainy plainly branded on his or her face, for both sexes were represented. They were human beings, it was true, and yet they did not seem to be leading human lives. But still they could not be likened to animals, because animals do not pour vile poisons down their throats, and do not make one's blood curdle with blasphemous oaths and ribald utterances. No, it would be more apt to describe them as fiends in human shape who were in deadly antagonism to all that was noble, good, true, and upright, and who hated peace, order, and well-being.

The murder proved a very popular theme. It was discussed with avidity, and the feeling was made manifest that the wretched people were glad that Billy had succeeded in evading capture, and one blear-eyed, hoary-headed old sinner, who, I ascertained, had spent the greater part of his life in jail, expressed himself thus—

"There ain't nothink as could a-give me more pleasure than Billy a-dodgin' the coppers. I hates coppers, I does. They're allers down on us, and I likes to hear of 'em a-bein' bested. They thinks 'emselves

so smart and clever; but this yere covey, Billy, has a kep' 'em on the hop for weeks, and they ain't a-nabbed him yet."

"No; nor won't," sung out a half-drunken harridan of a most repulsive appearance.

"Right yer are, Sal," answered the man. "I daresay you could tell 'em a thing or two if yer liked to open your mouth, eh?"

"You bet;" sniggered the harridan, with a cunning leer; "but they'll have to be mighty smart to get anythink out of me."

At this there was a general laugh, and Sal seemed so highly delighted with herself that she executed a *pas de seul*, and exclaimed when she had finished—

"I'm mighty dry; will any one stand me a pen'orth o' beer?"

"Yes, missus, I will," I answered, whereupon she put forth her grimy, bony hand to shake mine, and said—

"You're a proper sort of a bloke, you are. Give us yer flipper, old man."

Perhaps I ought to have mentioned that I had not gone to this haunt in my character of detective; that would never have done, for these people would, like snails when their horns are touched, have withdrawn into their shells, and I should have learned nothing. My character for the nonce was that of a dilapidated tramp, and so no restraint was put on the conversation, and the unguarded utterances of the depraved beings aided my purpose materially.

In paying for the beer that I ordered for "Sal," as she had been called, I purposely changed half-a-crown, and I noticed how the wolfish eyes of some of those about me glared greedily at this unwonted display of wealth, and I increased Sal's admiration and gratitude

—if such a creature was capable of gratitude—to a still higher pitch by standing her a pennyworth of gin to mix with her beer; and as she tossed off the horrible compound and wiped her shrivelled lips with the back of her hand, she exclaimed—

"You're a proper sort, you are; and if yer wants me ter love you, lend me threepence. Yer needn't be afraid, mate, I'll pay yer back. Everybody knows me. I'm Sally Renshaw, and I keeps the dossing-house, 217, Brick Yard, Scotland Road. Ain't that right, mates?"

"That's right, Sal," answered several, in response to the appeal.

"And I always pays what I borrows, don't I?"

"Yes, yer do, Sal; there ain't no doubt about that," was the answer.

"Then, blow me! if I don't lend you the threepence," I said; "and I'll come to your place for it the day after to-morrow."

"Right yer are, sonny," she replied, "and yer shall have it, or blast me!"

Of course I handed her the coppers, which she at once invested in beer and gin, and I felt that this hideous creature was likely to be of use to me.

As soon after as possible I slipped away, glad indeed to get out of the atmosphere of villainy. I found, on inquiry amongst the police, that Sarah Renshaw was one of the dangerous characters to be found in all large cities. Not only did she give harbourage to criminals, but she trained youths of both sexes to become criminals. She had been in prison several times, and was not only regarded as incorrigible, but absolutely irreclaimable. She kept one of the lowest lodging-houses in the town, and made a boast of her cleverness in "bilking" the

police. From what had passed in the "Three Bells," and what I was now told, I came to the conclusion that it was more than probable that this horrible creature knew something about the man I was hunting for, and so I resolved to see if I couldn't get that something out of her.

Two days later, in accordance with the arrangement, I presented myself at her den, and truly it was a den. She redeemed her promise by returning me the threepence I had lent to her, and then, in order to facilitate matters, I said I would go out and procure some liquor, whereupon she expressed her intense gratification, vowing that her throat was as hot as an empty copper with a fire underneath it, and that she would die if she had not a drink. This sort of trafficking with people of her class is one of the many unpleasant duties that fall to the lot of all who have to deal with the criminal classes. And revolting as these duties often are, they have to be undertaken with good grace in order that justice may be done on those who break the law. Such people as Sarah Renshaw represented have to be met with their own weapons in order that they may be circumvented in their rascality. And as such creatures generally have a craving for drink, their weakness in this respect has to be utilized, and it often proves a very effective means of bringing to light secrets that otherwise would never be disclosed, for when the brain is befogged with alcohol, the tongue wags incautiously.

In a little while I returned to Sal Renshaw's den with a bottle of gin, which made the old human spider smack her lips in pleasurable anticipation, and she expressed her appreciation of my generosity by a string of terms forcible enough in all conscience, but which would not

look well in print. Notwithstanding that she was pretty well case-hardened, the potent spirit which she poured down her throat speedily affected her; and when she had reached what I might term the incautious stage, I incidentally introduced Billy the Bagman's name, and got her to talk of the murder.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, with an exultant laugh, "Billy'll never be tuk."

"Did you know him?"

"Know him!—why, of course I did."

"And did you know the woman he put in the barrel?"

"Yes; she's stayed here along with him, but she used to mop (drink), and she and Billy was like cat and dog. I've heard him say many a time he'd do for her, and I ain't surprised that he stopped her wind. He was a good sort was Bill, I tell yer; and used to spend his money like a prince, he did."

"I suppose that he's all right in some foreign part by this time?" I remarked, in a manner that suggested the subject had no interest for me whatever.

As I asked the question, the old woman turned her red eyes upon me, and I don't think I ever saw a more devilishly-cunning expression in a human face than showed itself in hers, as she replied, putting her finger to her nose the while, and speaking *sotto voce*, and in the most confidential way—

"Don't yer make no mistake, cully. He ain't in no furren part."

"Where is he, do you think?" I asked carelessly.

"He's a-hiding somewhere where the cops won't get him."

"Is he in Liverpool?"

"Not that I knows on. Perhaps he is, and perhaps

he ain't, but I 'aven't 'eerd of 'im sin' he done the job. And it wasn't long afore that that he and his missus went to where he done it. What's the name of the place?"

"Glasgow?" I suggested.

"Yes, Glasger, that's it, and I'd bet a bob he's there yet."

"No fear," I remarked, with an affected laugh of derision.

"Why, no fear?" she demanded almost savagely.

"Because he'd been taken before this."

"That shows you don't know anything about it. You're a mug, you are. Bill's that fly that there ain't a cop in the country that's sharp enough for him. Why, he'll best the whole bloomin' lot on 'em. He ain't born to be scragged, Billy ain't."

"Then he's a proper sort," I remarked, as I helped her to a little more of the fiery liquid.

"Ah, you back he is," she answered, as she smacked her lips. "Why, look yeer, cully, Bill can get 'isself up like a woman that well that his own mother wouldn't know him. I've seen him do it many a time when he was on a lay."

As she uttered these words I felt a delight that I dare not show or express, for the creature had unconsciously given herself away, and put me up to a wrinkle that I knew how to make the most of. If Billy was an adept in the art of effectually disguising himself as a woman, it would account for his having been able to avoid being captured up to that time; and what was more likely than that, disguised as a woman, he still remained near the scene of his crime? Reasoning this out in my own mind, I resolved to work now on the hint that Sal had let drop; and getting away from her as soon as

possible, I left Liverpool that very night and returned to Glasgow, with a strong conviction that my visit to Liverpool had not been fruitless by any means, but that important results would come out of it. Strangely enough, within a week of my return, a boy was amusing himself by sending a dog into a pond in one of the many brickfields that abound to the south of the city, and while the dog was swimming about in the clay-pit it suddenly dived and brought a canvas bundle to the surface of the water, but let it go again, and it sank to the bottom. The boy, however, conceived the notion that the bundle perhaps contained something valuable; and taking one or two companions into his confidence, they constructed a drag by fastening an iron hook to the end of a piece of rope, and with this instrument they dragged the pond, and at last succeeded in bringing the bundle to the bank, but on opening it their horror may be imagined when it was found to contain human remains.

Information was at once given to the police, and I, in company with some colleagues, took charge of the ghastly find, and it soon became evident that we were in possession of the lower limbs of the murdered woman. They had been put into a sack, which was then weighted with a large stone, and flung into the pond. In the sack there were also an ordinary meat saw and a large carving-knife. Both these articles were red with rust through being submerged so long in the water, and there could be no doubt they were the instruments that had been used to amputate the poor woman's limbs. I had the saw and the knife cleaned up, and then I found that the saw bore the name of a local vendor in the town; and on showing it to him, he vaguely remembered having sold it to

a man whom he believed answered to the description of Gonzales. The knife was Sheffield make, but it was stamped on the blade with the mark of one of the hotels in Glasgow, and this set me pondering on the question—How did the knife come into the murderer's possession? Did he steal it, or was it given to him? He was not likely to have bought it in the ordinary way of trade, for it was nearly a new one, and the manager of the hotel assured me that it was not in the least probable that it had been sold. Therefore, the assumption was it had been stolen, and I began to make the most careful inquiries amongst the servants, with the result that I subsequently learned that Gonzales had been in the habit of visiting one of the kitchenmaids named Jean Fleming. She was about forty, and appeared to have seen a good deal that was attractive in Billy, for she allowed him to pay his addresses to her for a time. But he ceased to go to her about a fortnight before the murder, and she had not met him since. I should state that she had known him by the name of "Jack Willox," and on one or two occasions had written to him in that name, and addressed her letters to the care of a Mrs. Syme in a wynd off the Gallowgate. There wasn't a doubt that Gonzales, Billy the Bagman, and Jack Willox were one and the same person.

The trail was now getting more pronounced, and I directed my attention to Mrs. Syme. I found her to be a woman of very indifferent character, and not particular as to the means by which she made a living, though ostensibly she obtained it by taking lodgers. For several reasons I did not consider it advisable that Mrs. Syme should know that I was making inquiries about her. I therefore proceeded very cautiously

indeed, as I saw every reason to suppose she was a dangerous and cunning character, whose sympathies were certainly not with law and order. Of course, it was evident that she must have been pretty well acquainted with Billy the Bagman, inasmuch as she had received letters from him under the name of Jack Willox. I did not overlook the possibility that she might only have known him as Jack Willox, and been ignorant of the fact that it was an assumed name; consequently I resolved to be satisfied on the subject, and, assuming the character of a labouring man out of work, and very much down on his luck, I went to Mrs. Syme's lodging-house one afternoon, and in order to avert suspicion, and get on a good footing with her, I mentioned the name of a man who was then in prison, and with whom she had been very familiar. This bit of knowledge I had gained in the course of my inquiries, and I utilized it. The introduction placed me at once on a good footing with old Mother Syme, and by inference I led her to suppose I had tramped from the South in search of work, which was not forthcoming, and that consequently my prospects were not very bright. This led her to inquire what I was going to do.

"I don't know," I answered. "Things are queer, and there's not much chance for a fellow like me."

"Why not?" she demanded.

"Well, you see, mother, it's not many things I can turn my hands to."

"Isn't there?" she sneered caustically. "Well, look here, old man, if I was you, and had a pair of hands as good as yours, I'm blowed if there would be much I wouldn't get hold of in a small way."

"What do you mean?" I asked, though I knew

very well what she meant, and since she had thus revealed her true character, I determined that not much time should be lost before I cleared her out of her den, and placed her in safe keeping, if evidence to warrant that was forthcoming.

"What do I mean?" she replied. "You aren't a mug, are you?"

"Well, not quite, mother; but I'll be hanged if I know what you are driving at."

She laughed very unpleasantly, and looked at me with an expression of contempt as she remarked—

"Are you kidding, or what?"

"No, I'm not."

"Then you're precious innocent," she said.

"Maybe I am, for I've never done much wrong yet."

"Haven't you? Well, it's time you began. If you ain't got work, and you're starving, whose a-going to keep you, eh?"

"Nobody that I know of."

"Just so. Well, now, aren't you as good as them swells as rides in their carriages?"

"Perhaps I am."

"Of course you are, and so am I, and so is all of us poor folk. Now, what will the swells do for us if we ain't got anything to eat?"

"Not much, mother."

"Right you are. Then I say when the likes of us haven't got anything, and the swells won't give us anything, we've a right to take what we want from them. And, blind me! if I was a man if I wouldn't lay my hands on all I could get."

"But that's pretty risky, you know."

"Bah! If you're one of the tender-skinned sort, why don't you go home to your mother?"

"I haven't got one," I replied.

"Then get somebody else to take care of you," she sneered.

"Ah, I wish I could," I answered after a pause. "But that's not so easy."

"Then take care of yourself. And look here, my son, let me as knows a thing or two tell you this for a wrinkle—if you don't take care of yourself, nobody else will; and since you've got to live, like other folk, you must have something to live on; so don't be squeamish, but pick up whatever comes in your way."

This gave me the opportunity that I had been waiting for, and I said—

"I'd like fine to pick up that hundred pounds that's offered for the capture of the fellow what put the woman in the cask."

She turned upon me like a fury, and exclaimed—

"Look here, you clear out of my house! If that's the kind of fellow you are, I ain't going to have anything to do with you."

"Don't be angry with me, mother," I said, with a sort of whine. "I didn't know Bill was a pal of yours."

"I'm not saying he's a pal of mine. But, anyway, I wouldn't betray him."

"Maybe you've got some interest in him," I observed.

"Maybe I have; but anyway, that's my business."

"Well, I tell you this, missus," I said. "I heard a chap as was on the road with me say that Billy the Bagman would be taken before long, because it was known that he had called himself Jack Willox and other names, and wasn't far out of Glasgow."

I watched the effect of my words, and I saw the

creature's face turn pale, and a half-frightened look came into her eyes as she exclaimed—

"Who was it that told you he called himself Jack Willox?"

"Well, I can't tell you the chap's name."

Mrs. Syme was evidently much agitated, and it was some moments before she spoke again, and then in a sneering way she said—

"The chap what told you that was a fool, and take my straight tip—Billy will never be taken."

"Why?" I asked.

"Why? Because he's too clever for the police. When they get a cove like him to deal with they're lost."

"Well, he must be pretty clever if he's in Glasgow yet."

"Take my word for it, he is clever."

"I don't believe anyhow he's in Glasgow."

"Don't you?"

"No; he's safe in some foreign country by this time."

She broke into a coarse laugh of derision, as though she thought I was a great fool, and answered—

"The police think so, but that only shows how ignorant they are. Whenever they can't lay their hands on a fellow, they always say he's got out of the country, but that's only because they don't like people to think they're fools."

"Maybe your right, mother. But look here, if I had a fiver I'd bet that Billy the Bagman, or Jack Willox, or whatever he calls himself, isn't in Glasgow."

"Then I'd take your bet, and you'd lose your fiver."

"Ah, maybe you know where he is."

She grinned unpleasantly, but there was a world of meaning in her grin, though her only answer was—

"I'm not saying that."

I was perfectly convinced, however, from her manner that she was not speaking the truth—indeed, it was too much to suppose that such a wicked creature could speak the truth unless it was by accident, and her whole manner in the present instance betrayed that she was concealing something, and that something, it seemed to me, was nothing less than a knowledge of Billy's whereabouts. I was confirmed in this by her subsequent manner, for she manifested a strong dislike to me, and in the course of the afternoon she bluntly asked this question—

"I suppose if you was getting a chance to put the beaks on Jack Willox's track—"

"You mean Billy the Bagman," I remarked, as a correction.

"Well, it's the same thing. I was going to say if you was getting a chance to put the beaks on Billy's track, you'd do it for the sake of that hundred quid?"

"I'll tell you straight, mother, I would."

"That's all right. Then you can clear out of here. I don't want no fellow in my house that's ready to round on a poor bloke because he's had an accident. I don't believe Billy meant to kill his woman. But if he did she deserved it."

"Now, look here, mother; I'm going to let you have it straight," I said, pretending to get into a temper. "You're mighty virtuous, no doubt, but I'm not mug enough to believe that if you knew where Billy was you would not go for that hundred pounds. Mind you, it's

a big bag of money, and one would want to be mighty fond of a person to resist it."

My remark excited her greatly, and, glaring at me with positive ferociousness, she exclaimed—

"You don't know me, you fool, or you wouldn't talk like that! Not twenty hundred pounds would make me betray my own flesh and blood. Now, then, put that in your pipe and smoke it, and then cut your stick as soon as you like. I don't want you here."

She could not have played into my hands better than she did. I needed no second intimation, but telling her that I thought she was treating me very badly, I took my departure; and now more than ever I felt I was on Billy the Bagman's track, and I should have been disposed then to have pledged myself that I would run him down.

During the short time I had been with Mrs. Syme I had gradually worked out a theory as she revealed her true character, and the theory was this: For some reason or other, which I could not determine at that moment, she was desirous of screening Billy from the consequences of his crime, and that she knew of his hiding-place. All this seemed to me to be beyond doubt, but little did I dream how startlingly dramatic would be the *dénouement*.

As I knew that to attempt by legal measures to compel this dreadful woman to betray her secrets would in all probability only result in failure, and by putting Billy on his guard enable him to thwart justice altogether, I determined to shadow her silently and persistently in the hope that I should pick up some thread that would lead me to the criminal's hiding-place.

It was not an easy thing shadowing in that neighbourhood, for the denizens of it were all more or less at war with society, and were not likely to aid the law's representative. On the contrary, they would rather have taken a delight in baulking me in every possible way if they had got an inkling of my object. It was necessary, therefore, for me to exercise the utmost caution, because people of that class are always peculiarly suspicious. They are like hunted animals, ever on the alert for danger; and of course their imaginations being excited, they are apt to take fright at very small causes.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, I managed for three long weeks to keep my eye, as the saying is, on Mrs. Syme, and during that time I saw much that confirmed the opinion I had formed of her, which was that she was bad to the core, and an exceedingly dangerous person, and as cunning and artful as it was possible for a human being to be. Although I watched her so closely during those three weeks I never allowed her once to catch sight of me. That had to be avoided at almost any cost, for if once she had been put on the alert she might have increased my difficulties tenfold.

After three weeks of watching without any definite result, I began to think that after all I should have to try some other plan; but one evening about eight o'clock I saw Mrs. Syme leave the wynd in company with an old woman, who wore a long cloak and seemed very frail. They proceeded along the Gallowgate, and I followed them. Presently they stopped at the door of a public-house, and after talking together for a few minutes, Mrs. Syme went in, but reappeared in a little while, and handed her companion something in a glass, which the feeble old woman took, and with one gulp

tossed off the liquor. Now, there was a peculiarity in her movement as she did this which caused an idea to flash through my mind that the feeble old woman was none other than Billy the Bagman, who had so long been wanted. The movement of her arm as she raised the glass was not that of a woman, but a man. It was a trifling matter, but my experience as a hunter of criminals had taught me to value the slightest sign likely to lead me on the right track; and I was certain that no old and stricken woman, as she appeared to be, would have lifted a glass to her lips as that one did. In performing the act she displayed to my keenly-alert faculties signs that were suggestive of a man's strength rather than an old and tottering woman's weakness; and remembering what I had learnt at Sal Renshaw's in Liverpool, I began to believe that at last I had run the cruel murderer down.

When the old woman had finished her liquor and Mrs. Syme had returned the glass to the house, the two took themselves off, and I kept on their track to the High Street, up which they turned. During this time I studied every movement of the supposed old woman, and as I did so I became more and more convinced that she was not a woman, for occasionally she seemed to forget her feebleness and to walk as well as I did.

Passing a policeman on the road I spoke a few hurried words to him, and told him to follow me closely. Then hurrying forward on the opposite side of the street until I had got ahead of the "women," I re-crossed the road, and coming back, met them.

"Good evening, Mrs. Syme," I said. "You're enjoying a walk?"

She did not recognize me, but seemed greatly disconcerted, and exclaimed in a very agitated tone—

"Who are you? I don't know you, man."

"Perhaps not, but I know you, you see; and who's your friend? She seems very old."

"She's a poor body who's been sick for a long time, and I've just brought her out to get the air."

I could not see the "poor body's" face very well, for there was not much light just then; moreover she wore a large projecting bonnet with a veil. So wishing to hear her speak I said—

"And are you getting better, mum?"

I might, however, have spoken to a stump for all the notice she appeared to take of me, and Mrs. Syme exclaimed—

"It's no use talking to her; she's as deaf as a stone wall."

"Is she?" I replied, and then putting my lips close to the mysterious person's ear I said loudly—"There are none so deaf as those who won't hear. Now, tell me, isn't your name Ferdinand Gonzales, otherwise Billy the Bagman, otherwise Jack Willox?" As I spoke I seized her by the arm, and the policeman, who had been waiting my signal, rushed forward to render me assistance. The moment I got my grip on the arm I knew that the working muscles beneath my hands were not the muscles of a feeble woman, but of a strong man; and at last law, as presented by me, had seized the brutal murderer who for so long had cunningly evaded his well-deserved doom.

As Mrs. Syme recognized that the game was up at last, she for a moment or two betrayed the greatest agitation. Then she went for the policeman and began to belabour him with all her might, while my prisoner turned upon me like a tiger at bay, tried to throw me, and a desperate struggle ensued, for the fellow recog-

nized now that it was a struggle for life, and he made a tremendous bid for it. Such a struggle in such a place could not, of course, last long. A crowd soon surrounded us, many of them being denizens of the slums of the neighbourhood, and consequently not to be relied upon. But still there were some decent citizens among them, and I called upon them in the name of the Queen and the law to render assistance, and four or five men came forward willingly. Nevertheless, Billy gave us considerable trouble. He fought like a demon, and it was only when we had got him on the ground and sat upon him, literally, that I was able to handcuff him. Woman as she was, Mrs. Syme showed herself a most formidable antagonist, and it took two men to subdue her.

By this time several policemen had been gathered to the spot, so that Billy must have recognized that all hope had passed. But, notwithstanding, he struggled and fought with the desperation of despair, and the services of six policemen were required to get him to the station. Of course, Mrs. Syme was arrested at the same time; and never shall I forget the excitement in the town when it became known, as soon it did, that the notorious criminal who had so long avoided capture had been taken at last. Thousands of people assembled in the neighbourhood of the station, and a strong force of police had to be collected to keep them moving on. From the slums and wynds, too, the foul denizens poured forth, and a rumour spread that an attempt was to be made to rescue the woman and the man. But it was nothing more than a rumour, though, as a matter of ordinary precaution, special means were taken to safeguard the prisoners.

All doubts of Gonzales' identity were soon set at rest, and on searching him we found that he was armed with

a loaded revolver, and a formidable knife in a sheath, and he declared, now that his game was up, that if he had only got the chance he would have used these weapons against his would-be captors, and would never have been taken alive. His disguise as a woman was really admirable, and very few people indeed would have detected the man in the woman's garb. Of course, his voice was not a woman's voice, nor could he make it resemble one, but in all other respects he might have deceived his own mother, as Sal Renshaw had told me he could.

Am I guilty of egotism for taking praise to myself for having tracked the villain down? It had been a long affair, and I had had to piece in link after link with considerable difficulty. Investigation brought to light that Mrs. Syme was the fellow's sister, and she had harboured him in her house, where he passed for an old, feeble, deaf and dumb woman. What his and her ultimate ideas were it was not easy to determine, but possibly they thought that when the hue and cry had died down, he would be able to leave the country without fear of capture. Billy's cunning and artfulness were truly remarkable, and the strong probabilities are he would have escaped had I not stuck so persistently to the slender clues that I got hold of. He had seen from the first that to leave Glasgow would be a highly dangerous proceeding, and so he had gone into hiding in his sister's house, and must often have chuckled as he saw how he was baffling those who were so anxious to lay him by the heels.

Scarcely a day passed after his capture but the web was tightened around him, and such a tremendously powerful chain of evidence was constructed that there was not the slightest flaw to give him hope. It was

proved that the woman he had murdered was Alice Graham's mother, whom he had systematically ill-used for a long time. He had taken the poor creature's life in a hut in the brickfield where the lower limbs were found. The field was not being worked at the time, and the hut was consequently not in use. So deliberately had he planned the crime that he provided the barrel and a bag of sawdust three or four days before the commission of the deed, and placed these things in the hut ready for use. He had also bought the saw and stolen the knife in anticipation of their being necessary for his purpose. Seldom, indeed, had so ghastly a crime been undertaken with such cold-blooded calculation. Why he did not cast the whole body into the pond was never proved, but my own theory was this:—Although he deemed it probable that he would have to mutilate the remains of his victim in order to get them into the cask, he had no intention originally of sinking any portion of them in the pond. But he found, by actual experience, that the cask was not large enough for his purpose.

When the miserable wretch was brought up for trial, there was not a shred of evidence that could be offered in his favour, although, having command of money, he was well represented legally. But not even the lawyers who appeared for him could warp the truth so as to make it appear fiction, although usually lawyers are adepts in doing so, and a well-merited death-sentence was passed. If ever a wretch deserved hanging he did surely; nevertheless, some morbid sentimentalists tried to get the sentence altered, though I am happy to say they did not succeed, and Billy the Bagman died by the hands of the hangman. To the very last he preserved a sullen, morose demeanour, and went to the

scaffold without making any confession. It remains for me to say that Mrs. Syme was duly convicted of having harboured the criminal; she got a long term of imprisonment, and her den of infamy was thus broken up.

A DESPERATE VENTURE.

Early in the morning of an autumn day a commercial traveller named Archibald Allison arrived in Edinburgh from the South. He had left London the previous night by the London and North-Western Railway, and his business route lay through the principal towns of Scotland, which he was in the habit of visiting about every three months. He represented the firm of Privet, Prescott & Lyle, manufacturing jewellers, of London and Birmingham. It was a very large house, with a world-wide connection, and they gave employment to quite an army of people. To the "trade" all over the country they were exceedingly well known, and their names were a guarantee for good material and excellent workmanship.

Allison had been in their service for nearly thirty years, and was not only highly respected, but unbounded confidence and trust were placed in him. He was a man of the most persuasive tongue and attractive manner, with a suavity that was irresistible, and the patience of Job himself. Nature, indeed, had specially formed him for his calling, and he was considered to be one of the most successful men "on the road." He was a good-looking, burly fellow, with a refined air and a most gentlemanly deportment. He dressed well, looked well, smoked well, dined well, and in every way seemed to be particularly favoured by nature. He was known to live in good style in London. He owned an imposing-looking house on the borders of Clapham

Common, and he had a charming wife and a family of seven children—three sons and four daughters. He was very ambitious about his sons, being desirous that they should take a much higher walk in life than he had done; and so one was being educated for the army, another for the navy, and the third and youngest had been sent to Oxford—his station in life was to be afterwards determined.

Mr. Allison carried with him to Edinburgh a large "sample box" of extra strong construction, and this again was enclosed in a leather case which fastened with a patent lock. These precautions were necessary, because his samples represented very considerable value, more so than usual on this particular occasion, for the reason that he carried with him a considerable quantity of some special designs of his firm, which were intended for Christmas and New Year presents. Altogether the contents of his sample case were valued, wholesale, at something like between three and four thousand pounds.

Having refreshed himself with a wash after his night's journey, and partaken of a good breakfast, he engaged a caddy to accompany him on his rounds and carry the case of sample jewellery, which was pretty heavy. The caddy, a man of the name of Jamieson, had been in the habit of working with Allison for years, and his employer had great confidence in him.

About eleven o'clock in the morning the two set off on their round, the first call being made at a well-known jeweller's in Princes Street. As was the custom, Jamieson followed his master into the shop, unfastened the straps of the case, then retired to wait outside until the business was transacted. The straps of the case being loosed, Mr. Allison put his hand into his pocket for his

bunch of keys—three different keys being required for the case—but to his astonishment the keys were not there, consequently he could not open his box and display his samples. Then he remembered that he had changed his trousers after breakfast, and so it seemed pretty certain that he had left his keys in the pocket of the trousers he had taken off. He therefore called Jamieson into the shop, told him to go with all speed to the hotel, mount to his (Mr. Allison's) room, and bring the keys from the pocket of the trousers he would find hanging up in the wardrobe.

So far all seemed well. Mr. Allison waited patiently for his man's return, and chatted pleasantly with the shopkeeper. Jamieson was absent a little more than twenty minutes. Then he returned with the information that there were no keys in the place indicated. Mr. Allison was a little puzzled, and was not sparing in blaming himself for an act of carelessness which he was not often guilty of. So he left his case in the custody of the shopkeeper, and started back to the hotel, anticipating that he would find the keys in his portmanteau somewhere, but a thorough and exhaustive search failed to bring them to light. Then he began to think that he remembered in a vague way that he had left them on the dressing-table of his bedroom in his house in London; and in order to set his mind at rest he telegraphed to his wife, and told her to wire immediately if the keys were there. In the meantime he returned to the shop, explained his difficulty, and the shopkeeper suggested that an appeal should be made to a locksmith, and he mentioned a man with whom he was acquainted, and who resided in the High Street. Consequently Allison, accompanied by his servant, and carrying the case with him, got into a cab and drove

off to the High Street. They found the locksmith at home, explained the situation to him, and he, having examined the locks, expressed the opinion that amongst his immense store of keys he would find some that would answer; for, though the locks were very strong and good, there was nothing out of the way or intricate about them. After many trials he succeeded at last in getting a key that served the purpose, and the case was opened. Mr. Allison, as may be supposed, was very gratified. The contents of the case were intact, so he purchased the key from the locksmith, and started off once more to do business.

After a long day's work, and a successful one, he returned to his hotel, and that evening had a snug little dinner with a party of friends. He retired soon after midnight, and rising the next morning a little after seven, breakfasted, and was on the road by half-past eight. His first call was at a shop in South Bridge Street. I ought to mention that the previous afternoon he had received a wire from his wife to inform him that the keys had not been found where he indicated they would probably be found. That was on the dressing-table, and a careful search about the house had failed to discover them. Being now provided with a duplicate he was not concerned, though he racked his brains trying to determine what he could possibly have done with his keys; and, if they were lost, where he could have lost them. But it was all useless. He could arrive at no satisfactory solution of the mystery.

He now proceeded to open his case in order to display his samples to the shopkeeper, but judge his amazement when he found that with the exception of a few comparatively insignificant trinkets all the valuable

property had gone. To say that he was dumfoundered would be no exaggeration. He was electrified and amazed. A daring and extraordinary robbery had been committed since the previous afternoon, and now arose the question—"Who was the thief?"

Mr. Allison's position was an exceedingly unpleasant and difficult one, and it placed him in a dilemma. During all the years he had been travelling he had never lost anything of consequence before. Now a large amount of property had been cleared off at one fell swoop, and his business was brought to a standstill owing to his want of the necessary samples. I happened to be in Edinburgh at the time, and one of Allison's customers who knew me very well suggested to him that it was within the bounds of probability I might be able to track the stolen property. So Mr. Allison sent me an urgent message asking me to call upon him, which I did without delay. Naturally he was very much perturbed, for he seemed to fear that his firm might think he had been careless in some way. He replied without the slightest reservation to all my questions, and I gathered from him the particulars with regard to himself which I have given in the foregoing pages. Necessarily I directed my inquiries to his proceedings on the previous day, and he said that the last person he called upon was a jeweller in Leith Walk. He had his sample case open there, but did not do any business, and he returned straight to his hotel, arriving there at half-past six. I suggested the possibility of the goods having been abstracted between the jeweller's shop in Leith Walk and the hotel, but he assured me that could not be, as the caddy walked in front of him all the way and he never lost sight of him or the case. On arriving at the hotel he had the case carried at once to

his room, and saw it deposited in a cupboard there was in the room. This cupboard, however, was without a key, but he did not concern himself about that, for he had never lost anything before, and did not suspect that his property might be in danger. Having washed himself and changed his clothes, he went down to the dining-room, where he was joined by the friends he had invited to dinner. Having dined, they adjourned to the billiard-room, where they smoked and played billiards up to twelve o'clock. His friends then left him, and he went to bed, so that he knew nothing about his loss till the following morning. As there was no reason to doubt the accuracy of his story, it was made evident that the robbery had been committed between the hours of about 7.30 in the evening and midnight, because when he retired to rest he locked and bolted the door, and it would have been impossible for any one to have entered the room without his knowing it. The inference I drew, therefore, was that somebody, who knew the hotel well and knew Mr. Allison's business and habits, had gained access to the room, and by means of false keys had succeeded in abstracting the property. It was very obvious that the cases had been opened by keys, because the locks had not been injured in any way. This argued, therefore, on the face of it that the thief had come fully prepared to carry out his project.

"I feel convinced in my own mind, Mr. Allison," I said, when we had freely discussed the affair, "that it is no local thief who has carried off your goods."

"Who could it be, then?"

"Ah, I cannot quite answer that question at present," I replied. "But I should say somebody has followed you from London."

He looked surprised and incredulous.

"I don't believe that," he said. "I should say it was some prowling vagabond who was staying in the hotel, and he could not have premeditated this robbery. He was probably sneaking round the different rooms in search of unconsidered trifles, and he came across my sample case by accident."

"How did he open it, then?" I asked.

This was a puzzle to Mr. Allison, and he exclaimed—

"By Jove! I had forgotten that."

"Of course you had. Now, you say the locks of the cases, the inner and the outer, had not been tampered with?"

"I am perfectly certain they had not."

"How were they unlocked, then?"

"With keys that fitted the locks."

"Do you suppose, then, that it is likely a casual thief would be provided with keys of the kind required to open your sample cases?"

"He might," answered Mr. Allison, after a pause, and as if he was disinclined to concede that my theory was the correct one.

"He might," I repeated ironically, "and he might not. I should say the latter was far and away the most probable. The thief who has stolen your samples stole your keys first of all in London or elsewhere."

"He couldn't have stolen them elsewhere," he interrupted, "because I did not stop anywhere; and I am absolutely convinced they could not have been stolen while I was travelling."

"Very well then, they were stolen in London by some one acquainted with your movements, and that somebody followed you here, waited his opportunity, and so relieved you of the property. Now, you say that

you telegraphed to your wife, under the impression that you had left the keys on your dressing-table."

"Yes, that is so."

"What made you think you had left them there?"

"Well, it seemed to run in my head that I had done so. But after all it was only a vague idea, and I may be wrong."

"It is probable that you are right," I answered. "And it may turn out that some member of your household could throw a little light on the matter."

Mr. Allison seemed indignant at my even hinting at such a thing. He said it was preposterous, absurd, and a far-fetched theory.

"It may seem so to you," I remarked, "but in my experience it is the far-fetched theories that generally turn out to be correct. In this instance it seems to me the loss of the keys have a direct bearing on the robbery. You yourself can suggest no likely means by which your keys could have gone astray. This reduces the matter from the region of mere speculation, and makes it almost certain that the keys were stolen. That being so, we must find out the person who took them, and then we'll get at the jewel robber."

My argument made Mr. Allison thoughtful, and he admitted at last, though not altogether willingly, as it seemed to me, that I might be right. But he expressed himself quite unable to point to any member of his household who would have been likely to have done such a thing.

As may well be imagined, he was in great distress of mind, for his journey was rendered useless owing to his want of samples; but he elected to make one or two calls in Edinburgh and Glasgow upon well-known customers before he returned south. In the meantime, being

urged by him to take every possible means to solve the mystery, I interviewed Jamieson the caddy, but he could only corroborate all that his master had told me about the loss of the keys. Jamieson was a worthy, honest enough fellow, and there was not a shade of anything to suggest that he had been in league with the thief. My next inquiries were directed to ascertaining who had slept in the hotel on the night of the robbery. It was a large hotel, and there were many people staying in it. While not strictly a so-called commercial house, commercial travellers resorted to it on account of the comfort it afforded, and its central position. The proprietors of the hotel—who were two brothers—were particularly anxious that the thief should be caught, as they considered that the reputation of their house was to some extent compromised, although Allison could not be acquitted of contributory negligence, inasmuch as he had placed a large amount of valuable property in an unlocked cupboard. Nevertheless the landlords were very sensitive on the subject, and prepared to go to almost any length to bring the robber to justice. They therefore rendered me every possible assistance, and together we carefully went over the list of people who had stayed in the house on the previous night. The movements of one of these persons aroused my suspicions. He arrived the same day as Allison, and gave his name as John William Smith. On the evening of the robbery he left about eight o'clock for Stirling, saying that he was going to start the next day on a walking tour through the Trossachs and elsewhere. He was described as a man of about seven or eight and twenty, well-built, dark-complexioned, rather good-looking, with closely cropped hair and a "military" moustache. His only luggage consisted of a travelling-bag, but he seemed to

be well provided with money, and paid his hotel bill with a five-pound Bank of England note.

On gathering these particulars, I came to the conclusion that it was important I should learn something more about the movements of this Mr. John William Smith. I therefore proceeded to Stirling, for there was no reason to doubt that he had really gone to Stirling, inasmuch as the boots carried his bag—which was pretty heavy—to the station, placed it in a second-class compartment of the Stirling carriage, and saw the distinguished stranger take his seat and the train move off.

On arriving at my destination, I ascertained that a person fully answering Smith's description had passed the night at the Royal Hotel, and the next day, contrary to his statement that he was going to walk through the Trossachs, he booked a seat by the coach and drove. The coach that day made the last trip of the season, and there were very few passengers, therefore Mr. Smith was more conspicuous than he otherwise would have been, and I easily followed his trail to Glasgow. But it ended after he landed from the steamer that took him up the Clyde. I could get no further trace of him after that.

Inferentially it now seemed to me highly probable that Mr. John William Smith was the thief, and I deemed it imperative that he should be found, though I did not deem it advisable to spend time in searching for him in Glasgow. If my surmises were correct, it was not in the least likely that he would remain there, and certainly he would not attempt to sell the stolen property there. Now, if my judgment was not at fault, it was clear that this man must have known all about Allison's movements, and he had followed him from London on purpose that he might rob him, having

ascertained beforehand that he carried an unusual amount of valuable samples, and what was no less clear, he had possessed himself of the lost keys; I say the lost keys advisedly, for the robbery occurring in connection with the keys going astray was something more than a coincidence, and now came the questions—

"How did Smith know of Allison's movements? and how did he obtain possession of the keys?"

These questions suggested the likelihood of Smith being connected, or having been connected, with Allison's household at Clapham. So I started at once for London, and within a short time of my arrival I had learnt a good deal of Mr. Allison's domestic arrangements. Amongst other things that came to my knowledge was that the youngest son, Victor Bruce, had been a source of grave anxiety to his parents. He was in his twentieth year, but young as he was his conduct and extravagance were disgraceful. I have already mentioned that he had been at Oxford. Some years of his life were spent at the Charterhouse Schools, and from there he had gone to Oxford, where his behaviour became so outrageous that he had been expelled after many ineffectual attempts to reform him. Of course, as is usually the case, he was the idol of his mother, who, as so many foolish women do in connection with their sons, looked upon his faults as very venial, and tried her best to screen him from the consequences of his folly. His father, on the contrary, was very severe, and had threatened to cast the lad off and wash his hands of him. This had led to a good deal of friction between the parents, the mother espousing her son's cause, and by her acts unwittingly encouraging him in his shameful career.

It appeared that a few days before Mr. Allison's

departure for the north, he had actually turned Victor out of the house, and forbade him to return until he had made a solemn promise to reform. This had led to a scene between the husband and wife, and subsequently —but unknown to his father—she admitted the youngster again, and he was in the house when his father set off on his journey. To some minds nothing of this would have seemed to have any bearing on the case I had in hand, but I took quite a different view, and resolved to know a good deal more about the family scapegrace before I gave up the trail I had struck. It did not occur to me that the young man had committed the robbery himself, because he would never have been so mad as to have gone to the same hotel as his father. As regards his personal appearance, he was tall, slim, and fair, so that he did not answer the description of the man who had journeyed to Stirling, and whom I had traced to Glasgow; but what seemed to me probable was that he might have been in league with the actual thief.

In a few days it had come to my knowledge that young Victor Bruce Allison was in the habit of visiting a certain lodging-house near the British Museum, and the attraction, as I ascertained, was a good-looking young woman, who was known as "Miss Edith Weldon." She was a ballet girl engaged at Drury Lane Theatre. This discovery was interesting and suggestive. Allison used to go to the theatre at night to take her home, and he had succeeded in obtaining the *entrée* behind the scenes, where he was looked upon as "a fast young fellow about town." Further inquiries on my part brought to light that Miss Edith Weldon had a bosom friend and confidante in the person of a "Miss Leslie Courtenay," also a ballet

girl; and, by scraping acquaintance with this young lady with the high-sounding name, I managed, by a little artful diplomacy, such as has to be resorted to in cases of this kind, to worm from her that her "dear friend" Edith was actually married to Victor Allison. And as Courtenay was present at the wedding she was able to give me the name of the church where the ceremony was solemnized, and I was thereby enabled to speedily confirm her statement.

The game had now increased in interest, and I shadowed Victor Allison and his young wife very closely indeed, and one evening I found myself seated at the same table with them at a well-known restaurant in the Strand, where they were supping, and I saw that Mrs. Allison, when she removed her gloves, was wearing a very handsome diamond ring. Now, it was a very remarkable thing that a ballet girl, whose salary could not exceed a guinea a week, and who was the wife of a scapegrace who had not a penny of his own to bless himself with, should be wearing a ring of such considerable value. But it was still more remarkable when taken in connection with the fact that amongst the stolen articles were several diamond rings. The significance of that could not possibly be ignored even by the most obtuse. Before taking any further steps I deemed it my duty to lay before Mr. Allison the result of my researches, for I felt deeply for him, and his grief was extreme when he heard what I had to tell him. And when he had recovered from the first shock he exclaimed—

"Now, sir, is it your deliberate opinion that my son has some connection with the robbery?"

"That, sir, is my deliberate opinion," I answered.

The unhappy father seemed crushed; but presently

he turned to me with a look of stern resolution in his face, and said—

"Sir, although this lad is my own son, I will not spare him, though in punishing him I wrench my own heart. But since he is on the down-grade to utter ruin, a check now may save him; therefore, sir, do your duty, and rest assured I shall not shrink from doing mine."

Of course, as far as I was concerned, I had no alternative, unless the law was to be tampered with, so I applied for and obtained a warrant for the arrest of Victor Bruce Allison and his wife. The latter was charged with having received stolen property, knowing it to have been stolen. They were both thunderstruck when I swooped down upon them, and the woman with hysterical sobs and screams declared that her husband had given her the ring, saying he had picked it up in the street, and she further averred that she was in perfect ignorance of his having acquired any property dishonestly. The husband supported this statement; and as investigation did not bring to light anything that would substantiate the charge against her she was set at liberty.

At first young Allison seemed disposed to adopt a defiant attitude, but when he began to realize the dreadful position in which he was placed his nerve gave way, and he made a clean breast of it, by which it appeared he had been in desperate financial straits, and having seen his father's keys lying on the dressing-table where he had left them, and knowing that he was starting on his journey with a great deal of valuable jewellery, he purloined the keys, and took a rascal into his confidence by the name of James Crane, who had already been in prison for uttering a forged cheque.

This fellow undertook to commit the robbery, and under the name of Smith he had stayed in the hotel in Edinburgh. His object in going on to Stirling was, as he hoped and expected, to throw the pursuers off the scent. But therein he defeated his own object. Of the stolen property he only handed over to Allison a very small quantity, and the rest he disposed of to a fence, but nearly the whole of this was recovered. Of course Crane was arrested, and having suffered a previous conviction he received a severe sentence. Young Allison got off with the light punishment of twelve months' hard labour.

It was a most fearful blow to his family, and his poor mother particularly was crushed into the very dust with grief and shame. It proved, however, a very salutary lesson to him, and when he had served his time he was an utterly changed and contrite man. His father sent him to Australia, where he soon gave promise of becoming a respectable and honourable citizen. His wife, the ballet girl, having been disillusionized, and got from him all that she could ever hope to get, took herself off, and was heard of no more, which, under the circumstances, might be considered a good thing. It was a sad and pitiable story altogether, but one which, alas! is by no means uncommon in the records of human weakness.

THE TRUE STORY OF PERCY MAPLETON LEFROY.

Of the many sensational trials which stand out so conspicuously in the criminal history of the century that of the wretch whose name is at the head of this article is certainly one of the most extraordinary. And though a good deal was made public during the unfolding of the strange tale before Sir John Coleridge, the Lord Chief Justice, and a jury at the Maidstone Assizes, on the 5th of November, 1881, there was much that did not come out, and I now propose to deal with the suppressed part of the story in this sketch.

The man's right name was Mapleton, but for some unexplained reason he had tacked "Lefroy" on to it; and it is as Lefroy that he will go down to posterity as a heartless and cold-blooded slayer of a fellow-man. He appears to have been a member of a respectable family, and had received a fair amount of education; but there is little doubt that he was spoilt and ruined by over-indulgence and the lack of that proper parental authority which might have guided him into a path of honour and rectitude. This indulgence was accounted for on the grounds that he was weak and delicate. If the physical weakness had been accompanied by a desire to distinguish himself as a man of moral worth the indulgence might have been excused; but morality was a thing he cared little about, while his vanity was so insufferable that there were no lengths he would not go in order to gratify it. He was particularly

anxious to see his name in print, and he believed, as so many thousands do, that, although he had never had any training, he could take to literature as a duck takes to water.

About twelve months before he committed the murder which brought him to the gallows, he entered the office of a friend of mine who was the editor of an important weekly paper, and requested to see the editor. The time was evening, and it happened to be the busiest night of the week in the office, and the paper had to go to press early on the following morning. So a message was sent down to the visitor with a request that he would state his name and business. Thereupon he handed in his visiting card, on which was engraved—

MR. PERCY MAPLETON LEFROY,
AUTHOR.

His private address was printed in one corner, and the name of a club in the other. But it was subsequently proved that he was not a member of the club, although he had been proposed for membership. The card was taken to the editor, who sent word that as he was very busy he could not see Mr. Lefroy, but if Lefroy would state his business it would be duly considered. At first he seemed very much annoyed at this, but after some reflection he asked for writing materials, and these being supplied he hastily scribbled the following note to the editor—

"DEAR SIR,—

"I regret exceedingly that you decline to see me, as I wished to bring under your notice a subject of remarkable interest, that I propose to deal with in a masterly article, and I should be glad to place

it at your disposal. However, on a future occasion we may be able to go into the matter. In the meantime, I beg to leave to your consideration two or three short sketches, which I hope you may be able to use, and I will take the liberty of calling upon you next Monday week.

"Yours very truly,
"Percy Mapleton Lefroy."

This letter, which is not conspicuous for either its grammar or literary style, he sealed in an envelope and sent it upstairs, together with a packet of MS., and that done took his departure.

In the interval that elapsed before Lefroy called again, the editor did glance over the sketches left with him. He came to the conclusion, however, that they were exceedingly amateurish, and devoid of any signs of literary ability, and he intended to send them back to the writer and thus save him the trouble of calling again; but a pressure of business caused him to forget to do this, and, true to his promise, Lefroy returned at the appointed time. It was Monday, and that being a slack day the editor told his clerk to show the visitor up. Lefroy at this time was about twenty-one years of age. Under that rather than over. He was a remarkable-looking youth, with a scowling and rather sullen expression of face; but under the varying emotions of the mind this gave place to scorn, vanity, or wounded pride. He was dressed in a very dandified fashion, although the clothes he wore were poor and had seen much service. He had two if not three common rings on his fingers, and his cravat was fastened with a very Brummagem scarfpin set with a flash diamond. His hands were covered with a nearly

new pair of cheap dogskin gloves, and he carried a cane ornamented with a gilt knob. There was a restless nervousness about him which was peculiar, and attracted attention, and on entering the editorial sanctum he took off one glove and dropped it on the floor. Then without being requested to do so, he drew up a chair to the editor's desk and sat down without removing his hat. But suddenly seeming to remember it, he took the hat off hurriedly and placed it on the floor, but instantly caught it up and put it on his head again; a moment after, however, he removed it once more, and then noticing his glove on the floor, he picked it up, threw it into his hat, and stood his hat on the desk.

All this only occupied a few seconds, and my friend was so struck with the fellow that he made a study of him, and then after the murder had been committed he related this story to me. He said that the impression made on his mind by Lefroy was this. He thought he was a highly nervous, irritable person, of a cruel, selfish, reckless nature; insufferably egotistical, and capable, under the influence of fancied wrong, of doing desperate things. This impression was more than confirmed in the course of the interview. The editor, who was a polite and gentle man, though intolerant of mere pretensions, informed his visitor that he had read his sketches, and could not help coming to the conclusion that they had nothing to recommend them, and further than that they showed a want of the rudimentary knowledge in the art of literary construction. He advised him, therefore, not to waste his time in futile endeavours to accomplish that for which it was obvious he had no ability.

This was said with a kindly bluntness to which Lefroy listened uneasily, wriggling about in his chair,

and occasionally twisting the ends of the scant moustache that was beginning to cover his mouth. His face had changed rapidly in its expression, and at last with a scornful curl of the lip, and looking very pale, as if from suppressed excitement or emotion of some kind, he answered—

"I attach no importance to your opinion, sir, which is the result of stupid bias or prejudice. You have chosen to treat me as if I were a nincompoop, but I may inform you that I am a recognized journalist, and have already gained some reputation as an author. I intend—and mark this—I intend to make my name ring through the world. I will, by God, though I have to commit murder to do it. Men shall talk about me from one end of the world to the other, and long after you are dead and forgotten I shall be remembered."

Having thus delivered himself, he thrust the rejected MS. into his pocket, put his hat on his head, and hurriedly left the room without another remark. The editor was glad to get rid of his rude and unwelcome visitor, for he set him down as a blatant young fool who was not worth another thought. But after the murder was committed, and the name of Lefroy was ringing throughout the land, as he had predicted it would do, my friend remembered that one of the sketches he had read amongst those left with him by Lefroy dealt with a murder, an old lady of wealth being killed in a railway carriage by a young man who was on the verge of starvation, and who tried to justify his wicked deed—firstly, by the poverty he endured, notwithstanding that he was gifted with genius, which the world, however, declined to recognize; and secondly, because the lady being very old, her life was all but spent;

therefore it was no crime to kill her and thus anticipate the end by a few weeks or a few months as the case might be; and thirdly, on the grounds that genius ought not to starve when money could be had for the taking.

This theory and idea had a very strange significance when viewed in connection with the barbarous crime for which Lefroy forfeited his life; and another incident which did not come out at the trial may here be given, and will serve to illustrate the remarkable vanity of the youth. As near as the time can be fixed, it was about two years before the commission of the deed that Lefroy made the acquaintance of an exceedingly pretty girl, who occupied a humble position as an actress at a London theatre. He had a passion for the stage, and had tried acting, but had failed; he had also tried dramatic literature with an equal want of success. How he first made the girl's acquaintance is not clear. She knew him by the name of Arthur Henry Nelson, and he had the impudence to claim descent from the famous Lord Nelson, and gave her to understand that he was entitled to a large amount of property on the death of an uncle, who was then eighty years of age. The girl was foolish enough to believe all this, and when after they had known each other some little time he asked her to become his wife. She gladly consented, subject to his introducing her to his relatives and family. This he promised to do, but subsequently he told her that he was sure if his uncle came to hear that he had associated himself with an actress the fortune would be willed away elsewhere, for the old gentleman had a strong dislike to the stage and all connected with it. The plausibility of Lefroy's story led the girl to believe that it was true, but when he urged her to

marry him secretly, and vow on the Bible not to disclose the secret until he gave her permission to do so, she flatly and indignantly refused, saying that if his friends did not choose to recognize her openly the connection must cease, for she would not consent to any secrecy.

This angered him very much, and, as she was inflexible, he gave her up, notwithstanding that she had from time to time lent him sums of money, amounting in the aggregate to several pounds, and there is reason to believe that with the money thus obtained he kept up for a time the character of a well-to-do young fellow amongst certain acquaintances with whom he frequented billiard rooms and other resorts of fast youth. Of course, such false pretences as these could only serve a very temporary purpose, and when he separated from the young actress whom he had so shamefully deceived, he fell into pecuniary difficulties again, and he sought to relieve his necessitous condition by applying to a Jew moneylender, who advertised extensively that he was willing to lend money on note of hand only. This man kept an office near Charing Cross, and did a large business amongst City clerks and others, to whom he lent sums varying from three to ten pounds on bills of exchange, backed by two or three names, and for which he charged exorbitant interest.

To this rascal Lefroy represented himself as an author and journalist in very temporary difficulties through a little extravagance, and he endeavoured to get a loan of twenty pounds. Perhaps it need scarcely be said that the money was not forthcoming. The Jew evidently did not consider the position of his would-be client worth anything. At any rate, he didn't think it was worth twenty pounds with about seventy per

cent. tacked on to that. The negotiations, therefore, fell through; but it would seem as if Lefroy succeeded in "raising the wind" somewhere about that time, for he played the swell again for a while, though subsequently he returned to the Jew, and by means which were never brought to light, he prevailed on the Israelite to let him have ten pounds, for which he agreed to give a bill for twenty, and to get it endorsed by a person of position. He took the bill away, returning with it in about two days, and it was then endorsed by a highly respectable tradesman in business in Croydon. This endorsement subsequently turned out to be a forgery, but strangely enough the moneylender was taken in, and he actually advanced the ten pounds, and it may be said that that transaction drove the wretched youth in the end to the commission of the crime for which he died. Out of that ten pounds Lefroy purchased a dress suit, and nothing could serve better than this to illustrate his truly remarkable vanity. In that dress suit he swaggered about for a while, and endeavoured to keep up the delusion that he was a young man of means. But he very soon came to the end of his tether, and once more was confronted with difficulties, and not the least of them was that twenty-pound bill with the forged endorsement. It must have preyed very much upon his mind, and have driven him to desperation; and there is no doubt that about this time the idea of enriching himself at the expense of some fellow-creature's life had already entered his mind. At a period a little antecedent to this he had pawned a revolver in the name of William Lee, and it is highly probable the revolver was purchased with a portion of the money he had obtained from the Jew. Whether that was

so or not, this much is certain, on the day that he committed the murder he took the revolver out of pawn. It had been pledged for five shillings only, though how he succeeded in raising even that small sum was never satisfactorily proved, but probably he borrowed it. The 27th of June, 1881, was a Monday. On every Monday for some years a gentleman named Frederick Isaac Gold had been in the habit of coming to London from Brighton, where he lived, in order that he might receive certain moneys due to him. He was a retired tradesman, and had made his home at Brighton, but he retained an interest in a business in South London, which was under the control of a manager, and Mr. Gold made his weekly visits in order that he might examine the books and receive his share of the profits, which averaged something like £40 a week. On that fatal Monday, the 27th of June, he left his home at five minutes past eight, and reached London before ten. He was a season ticket-holder, always travelled first class, and was well known on the line. On that particular day he drew from his shop £38 5s. 6d. This sum, less the 5s. 6d., he deposited with his bankers, a branch of the London and Westminster. It appeared that it was his habit to sometimes take the weekly money to his London bank, and at others to convey it to Brighton, where he had an account with a local bank. On the day of his death, as it chanced, he left the money in London.

Percy Mapleton Lefroy, according to the defence, knew nothing of all this. He had never seen poor Mr. Gold in his life, and had never heard of him, so averred his counsel. Before his death Lefroy admitted that he went on the warpath seeking whom he might destroy, and fate placed Gold in his way. He wanted to come

across a lady who might have money in her possession. He was admittedly a cowardly knave, and preferred to tackle one of the weaker sex rather than one of his own, notwithstanding that he was armed with a loaded revolver containing six chambers; but it was not to be. According to his own account, he had no intention to take any one's life. He only wanted to commit robbery, and the revolver was to be used as a means of enforcing his demands.

The failure of the prosecution to establish at the time that Lefroy knew anything of Mr. Gold and his habits was made much of by the late Montagu Williams, who defended the prisoner, and who tried by swearing that black was white, and in spite of the most damning and overwhelming evidence of guilt, to prove him a stainless lamb. But, notwithstanding the use of a good deal of cheap claptrap and tawdry sentiment, to which Mr. Williams was much given, he quite failed to impress either the judge or the jury, and the murderer was duly convicted after a long and patient trial. There are good grounds now, however, for saying that Lefroy had become acquainted with Mr. Gold's circumstances and his habits, and this had probably been brought about by a vagabond whom I will refer to under the fictitious name of Smith. He was much older than Lefroy, and had led a very questionable life. He was in the habit of going about the country attending race meetings, and frequently went down to Brighton, where he was courting a servant girl who had saved a little money, which she had in the bank, though, under the impression that she would become his wife, she had given Smith several pounds out of her savings. This fellow and Lefroy were, to use a vulgar term, "pals." What is more probable than that Smith

had observed Mr. Gold on several occasions, and had formed an opinion that he was a man who carried large sums of money about with him. He might have given the hint to Lefroy, who had followed it up by watching Gold's movements. I do not say that this is irrefutable, but I have strong reason for believing it true, and any one who will calmly peruse the evidence, now that Lefroy has been mouldering in his dishonoured grave for twelve years, cannot fail to come to the conclusion that his meeting with Gold on that memorable Monday was something more than a mere coincidence. It is true that Lefroy, before his execution, stated that he would have preferred to have met a woman, and, no doubt, that was so; but there was no woman there at the time who seemed likely to be in possession of means, and so he devoted his murderous attention to poor Mr. Gold.

The commission of the crime and the incidents connected with it were so highly dramatic that their recapitulation cannot fail to be of interest.

The Brighton express left London Bridge at two o'clock, and by that train Mr. Gold almost invariably returned to his home on Monday. About ten minutes before the starting of the train, Lefroy, who had purchased a first-class ticket, presented himself on the platform. He was observed by the guard to walk up and down, and peer into all the carriages as if looking for somebody he expected. Then he got into a first-class compartment where Mr. Gold was already seated. That act certainly did not look as though he was utterly unacquainted with Gold, but to any reasonable mind it suggests that he was well aware of Gold's habits, and was searching for him. The carriage was what is known as a composite. That is, it consisted of first and second-class compartments. The first com-

partment nearest the engine was a smoking second; then came a non-smoking first; next, smoking first; lastly, non-smoking second. It was in the smoking first that the murderer and his victim were seated when the ticket collector came round to examine the tickets, and knowing Mr. Gold, he passed the compliments of the day to him, and he noted that the other passenger —Lefroy, of course he did not know then—was clad in an overcoat though the day was warm, and that he kept one hand in his coat pocket. Punctually at two the signal was given; the train moved away, and to use a theatrical simile, it might thus be said the curtain was rung up for the first act of the grim tragedy. A few hours later all London was to be startled by a report that a crime of almost unparalleled atrocity had been committed in the two o'clock express from London to Brighton, and that the whole affair was for the time enshrouded in what seemed to be an impenetrable mystery.

The bloodthirsty young ruffian, so young in years and yet so old in sin, would seem to have restrained his murderous intentions until after Croydon was passed. The run by the express from London Bridge to Croydon occupied exactly twenty-three minutes, and speed was slackened a little as the train passed through the station, but once clear it put on speed again, and soon reached the entrance to a tunnel a mile long, and eight from Croydon. At that moment a passenger named Gibson, who was travelling in one of the second-class compartments, was startled by what he thought was the explosion of fog-signals. There were four distinct explosions in rapid succession. Necessarily Gibson was astonished that fog-signals should be fired on a perfectly clear day, and he thrust his head out of

the window to try and learn the cause, but the train had already plunged into the tunnel, and all was darkness. Seven or eight miles farther on is a little place called Horley, and close to the line were two or three small cottages. A Mrs. Brown and her daughter, who occupied one of them, had come to the door to witness the express thunder by, and as it did so they caught sight of two men in a first-class compartment standing up and struggling fiercely together. They had but a momentary glimpse of the scene as the train flashed past, but it troubled them, as they thought that something was wrong—as in truth it was, for the murderer was doing his fiendish work, and the hapless victim was battling with all his failing strength for his life—but after a little while the two women concluded that the men were larking; and yet men do not often lark in such a way in a railway carriage. But what could the women have done? Even if they had reported what they had seen, it was too late to save Mr. Gold.

Seven miles farther is Balcombe Tunnel, through which the train passed safely, and drew up at a place called Preston Park, which is a mile and a half from Brighton Station and is a ticket-collecting station. The compartment occupied by Gold and Lefroy when the train left London contained only one passenger now, that one Lefroy. He seemed to be in a half-fainting condition and presented a sorry sight. He had a wound in his head; his clothes were draggled and torn; his collar was gone; he was bareheaded and smothered in blood, while the compartment was like a shambles after a slaughtering. Lefroy attracted the attention of a policeman, who spoke to the ticket collector, and to that official the blood-stained passenger related the following story:—

He said that when he left London there were two other men in the compartment. One he described as an elderly man, and the other as a seeming countryman of about fifty years of age. When the train entered the first tunnel he was attacked by the elderly man and knocked insensible, and from that moment to arrival at Preston Park he remembered nothing more. It seemed a plausible enough tale, and there was certainly gory evidence enough that there had been a terrible struggle.

Lefroy was of course requested to alight, and was assisted out of the carriage, and as he stepped on to the platform it was observed by the bystanders that part of a watch-chain was hanging from his shoe; and when he was asked about it, he said he had placed his watch and chain in his shoe for safety. The watch and chain were removed, and no one suspecting the truth of the ruffian's story, he was allowed to retain possession of the articles.

When the train had gone on, Lefroy was taken to the Town Hall, where he had to make a detailed statement, which was taken down, and which he signed. Throughout this trying ordeal, and though his hands were reeking with the victim's blood, he conducted himself with such coolness and self-possession that no suspicion was aroused, and he was commiserated with, and removed at once to the hospital, where his wound was dressed, and that done, he expressed a desire to return to his home, which, he said, was at Wallington, near Croydon, where he resided with his second cousin, and so he was permitted to return by the next train.

While these things were being enacted at Preston Park, evidence was forthcoming that there had been a ghastly tragedy on the line; for a platelayer having some business in the Balcombe Tunnel, forty minutes

after the London express had passed through, found at the entrance the body of a dead man. There were unmistakable signs, that a child could not have overlooked, of the gentleman having been shot in the neck. Further than that, the body bore several terrible knife wounds. Of course the platelayer made his discovery known as speedily as possible. The body was removed to a signal cabin, and the news telegraphed up and down the line. Much about the same time, or a little earlier, another platelayer discovered a hat on the up line at a place called Burgess Hill, which is about forty miles from London; and at a spot named Hassock's Gate a young woman employed on some labour in a field close to the line saw an umbrella lying on the railway track, and that umbrella turned out to have belonged to Mr. Gold. When the body of the dead man was further examined, and his pockets searched, it was noted that he had no watch or chain. Still a little later a second hat was picked up on the line, and that hat, as it turned out, belonged to Lefroy.

When the telegraphic news of the finding of the dead body reached Preston Park, Lefroy had left for Wallington, but the precaution had been taken to send two policemen with him. At one of the stopping places one of the Company's inspectors got into the carriage, and said aloud, so that Lefroy should hear it—

"I understand that the mutilated body of a gentleman has been found in Balcombe Tunnel. He appears to have been shot and stabbed, and all his valuables are gone."

The official watched Lefroy's face as he made the announcement, but he betrayed no signs of being either startled or alarmed. He merely remarked faintly—

"That, then, must be the work of the elderly man who attacked me, and I hope that not a moment will be lost in trying to find him."

It seems almost incredible that after this revelation of a tragedy any one should have bungled, but so it was; and had the murderer been provided with means and been a little shrewder he might have got clear off, for the policemen, having conducted him to the house in Wallington, and proved conclusively that he lived there, left him. Then he saw his opportunity, and availed himself of it. Having told the same story to his relative that he told at Preston Park, he went out saying that he was going to see a doctor, as he felt very ill, and would be back in the course of half an hour. But neither on that day, nor the next, nor the next, did he come back. He had obtained very little money by the murder of Mr. Gold, who only had between £2 and £3 in his pockets, but before leaving his cousin's house Lefroy helped himself to some of her money, taking £3, so that he was in possession of between £5 and £6, and with that sum he might have gone to the farthest ends of the kingdom, not that that would have helped him much, but as will be seen from what follows, if he had been a man of greater resource he could possibly have escaped the punishment that overtook him.

What became of him between the night of that dreadful day—the day of the murder, that is the 27th of June—and the 30th of June was never proved in actual evidence, and his movements were shrouded in mystery. But there are good grounds now for saying that he made his way to a house on the south side of London, where resided a young woman with whom he had been very intimate, and who was very much attached to him. What story he told her will never be known; but it is probable,

highly probable, that she knew something dreadful had occurred, and that he had been mixed up in it. For the next day the papers were full of the crime. It formed splendid "copy" for them, and such a chance was not to be thrown away. It was a sensation of sensations; and then there was the mystery of Lefroy's disappearance. It was just the sort of case that the public gloat over and revel in; a case that, had it been invented by the fiction-writer, would have aroused his critics to wrath. But here was a romance of real life that outstripped anything the fictionist was capable of conjuring up from his inner consciousness, and the papers—the high and mighty and respectable papers that deem it their bounden duty to cry down and write down anything in the shape of "sensation" that the novel-writer may indulge in—vied with each other in their efforts to leave no ghastly detail untold. And one paper having an enormous circulation started off a correspondent immediately the news came through, with his pockets laden with gold, and he was instructed to spare not the gold in his endeavour to get from officials and others every scrap of information. Edition after edition of the newspapers was issued; the "evenings" did a roaring trade, and as fast as ever they could be produced they were bought up. From one end of the land to the other was heard the hue and cry, and on everybody's lips was the question—"Where is Lefroy?" and echo answered "Where?"

His relatives at Croydon were visited and watched. They were subjected to the most inquisitorial questioning, but they could give no information about the missing man, for they were as ignorant of his whereabouts as every one else, save one person; that person was the young woman I have referred to. She did not give him away,

though it is impossible to suppose that she could have remained in ignorance that he was very much wanted.

On the 30th, however, he saw reason to change his quarters. They were getting too hot for him perhaps, or maybe the lady who had afforded him shelter was becoming alarmed, and may have urged him to go. At any rate, he disguised himself and fled east. That is, he went to Stepney, which is in the eastern part of the Great Babylon, and in Smith Street he obtained lodgings in the house of a Mrs. Bickers. He gave his name as Clarke, said that he was an engineer, and had come up to London to look for work. There were other lodgers in the house, but he scrupulously avoided them, and no living soul in that household seems to have had so much as the shadow of suspicion that the roof was sheltering the murderer of Mr. Gold, who had been so foully done to death on the Brighton railway.

A whole week passed and he remained secure, and might have continued to remain so for some time longer, had it not been for his own fatuousness. It is needless to say the country was being scoured. Detectives, amateurs and professionals, were doing their level best to tract the suspected man down. The papers, of course, kept the excitement up. The most sensational rumours were put forth one hour to be contradicted the next, and the most extravagant theories were indulged in. It is somewhat curious, however, that the idea of suicide seems to have found but few supporters. The prevailing opinion was that he had escaped to the Continent, and this opinion was supported by a good many of the papers. It was also shared to some extent by the authorities of Scotland Yard, for two detectives were despatched to France, and Lefroy's description was circulated pretty freely throughout Europe.

Of course, in the meantime, Mr. Gold's body had been identified; all that could be got hold of regarding him had seen the light of publicity, and his unhappy widow was pestered with the attentions of numerous correspondents of various papers. The inquest was held, and a verdict of wilful murder returned against Lefroy. The medical evidence proved conclusively that the victim had been shot and stabbed. But though the most exhaustive search was made for miles on each side of the line neither knife nor revolver was found, nor ever has been found up to the present hour. Having killed Mr. Gold, the murderer tossed his body out of the carriage, and between Balcombe and Preston Park there is or was much marsh land and many ponds. The weapons must have been hurled into one of these marshes or ponds; and if the wretch could have got rid of his victim's body as effectually as he got rid of the weapons that slew him, the Brighton Railway tragedy would have remained a mystery probably up to the present day. But, as every wilful slayer of his fellow-man finds out to his cost, a dead body is a terrible thing to dispose of. Neither in the earth nor the waters that cover the earth can it be hidden for long. It betrays its presence at last, and mutely cries for vengeance on the slayer.

Nearly a fortnight had now passed, and Lefroy had not been captured. A sleepless vigilance had been kept on the house at Wallington, and not a letter was delivered there nor one sent away the contents of which were not known to the authorities. Strangely enough, however, it was not known that he had passed the night of his flight and the next two nights and days in that house in South London. If that fact had been revealed, and a watch kept up there, much might have been

brought to light, and his hiding place discovered before he himself betrayed it.

During the time he was lodging in Smith Street, Stepney, he only went out of doors twice. The agony of mind he suffered during those terrible days will never be known. And yet there are some grounds for believing that he considered himself safe. He was known to peruse the papers diligently, and therefore he was fully alive to the extraordinary exertions that were being made to capture him, and he must have experienced curious sensations when he gathered that it was by the merest chance Mr. Gold had not been in possession of a large sum of money at the time of his death. As I have already stated, the defence tried by every possible means to prove that not only was Lefroy entirely innocent, but a victim himself, and that he knew nothing whatever of Mr. Gold. That theory, however, would not hold water. He had, as a matter of fact, made himself acquainted with Gold's habits, and had he selected the preceding Monday for the murder, he might have secured nearly, if not quite, fifty pounds from his victim. As it was, he had committed the atrocious crime for a paltry sum that was soon exhausted, and then he was forced to give himself away.

One day, when all the exertions of police and detectives had proved unavailing, he sent the servant girl at the Smith Street house to the post-office with a telegram. That telegram was sent in the name of Clarke, and it was received by a person who had an office in Gresham Street, City. The following was the wording of the message—"Please send my wages to-night without fail about eight o'clock. Flour to-morrow. Not 33."

There was a mystery shrouded in that despatch, and that mystery was never entirely cleared up. It is

needless to say that no wages were due to him. "Flour to-morrow" was a blind, and "Not 33" had reference to an address known to the receiver; and there is little doubt that the address was that of a house in South London. Therefore, the natural inference is that the person to whom the message was sent was in collusion with the murderer. But if that was so, he could hardly have been aware that he was living at Stepney, for as soon as he received the telegram he communicated with Scotland Yard, for he could not be indifferent to the danger he himself ran in doing anything that could be construed into an attempt to assist Lefroy in defying the law. Now, as it happened that he was a relative of the criminal's, it must have cost him a good deal of mental suffering to have to place the hangman's noose round his neck, but there was no help for it. A foul and horrible crime had been committed, and the life of a defenceless old gentleman savagely taken. The law therefore demanded vengeance, and any one trying to defeat that would incur a heavy punishment. So Lefroy's relative lost no time in betraying him, as he was bound to do. It was a July evening, hot, clear, and beautiful. The setting sun had transfigured even the squalid surroundings of East London, and the roofs and chimney-pots had caught a shimmer of gold. In every alley and street were heard the laughter and shouts of happy children—happy in spite of the poverty and wickedness that surrounded them. Working men, tired after their day's labour, sat at the doors of their houses in their shirt-sleeves and smoked the pipe of peace, while squalid women, with white-faced babies in their arms, gossiped to each other; and very likely, in not a few instances, the Brighton Railway tragedy and the escape of the murderer formed the subject of conversation.

Anxious and restless, the hunted man waited the result of his telegram, and there is not a doubt that he fully expected to receive some money that evening. His feelings may, therefore, be judged when between seven and eight two officers in plain clothes proceeded to the house in Smith Street and arrested him. They saw the landlady first, and asked if she had a lodger by the name of Clarke. Of course she answered yes, and was going to call him down from his room, which was upstairs, when they stopped her and said they would go up themselves. They found the door locked, but one tapped lightly, and Lefroy, who had been lying on the bed with only his shirt and trousers on, and without boots, sprang up and opened the door quickly, believing that the expected money had been brought. But when he beheld two stalwart-looking men he knew that he was doomed. His face blanched to an ashen grey, his lips turned blue, and he glanced nervously round the room as if in search of some means of escape.

Means there were none, however. All was hopeless now, and the shadow of the gallows there and then fell upon him.

"Your name is Percy Mapleton Lefroy," said one of the officers, laying his heavy hand on the fellow's shoulder, "and we arrest you on suspicion of having murdered Mr. Gold on the Brighton Railway on the 27th of June last."

"I am innocent," stammered Lefroy.

"I hope so," said the officer, "and trust you will prove it; but it is my duty to take you in charge."

The murderer made no further remark, but proceeded to dress himself; and while one of the men never took his eyes off him, the other searched the room, and

discovered a false beard, a wig, and a bottle of dye for darkening the eyebrows and moustache. Some pawn-tickets were also found in Lefroy's possession, and one of these referred to a dress suit. By this time it had become known in the house that Mr. Gold's murderer had found shelter there for so many days, and the excitement was intense; but before it could communicate itself to the neighbourhood generally, the officers had secured a cab, and placing their prisoner in it, they took their seats beside him and drove to the police-station, and from that moment it was destined that Lefroy was never to be lost sight of, sleeping or waking, by the law's representatives, until the fatal moment when the floor of the scaffold fell from beneath his feet and he was launched into eternity. That was not to be, however, for some time. After the police court formalities, he was duly committed to take his trial on a charge of wilful murder, and he was removed to Maidstone County Jail, the crime having been committed in the county of Kent. There he lay for nearly five months, and during that time his relatives left no stone unturned to try and secure his acquittal. The services of a well-known solicitor were engaged, and he busied himself in getting up such evidence as might be likely to avail the prisoner in the desperate circumstances in which he was placed. The late Montagu Williams was retained as counsel, and associated with him were two juniors. In such a case juniors, of course, occupy much the some position as jackals do with regard to lions. They have to provide the great man with materials for the defence, and do what may be described as the drudgery. They have to find out as much as they possibly can that is adverse to the witnesses on the other side; for it is part and parcel of a lawyer's trade to blacken the character

of a hostile witness, and the more he can do so the better he likes it.

During the time that the prisoner was incarcerated in Maidstone Jail awaiting his trial, he must have felt the terrible shadow lying upon him, and in his desperate despair he managed, by means which were never revealed, to get the following singular letter smuggled out of prison. It bore date, Monday, October 17th, 1881, and was addressed to a person whose residence was in South London. That person was the one in whose house he stayed during those three days after his flight from Wallington. The letter ran as follows :—

"My darling Annie,—

"I am getting this posted secretly by a true and kind friend, and I trust you implicitly to do as I ask you. Dearest, should God permit a verdict of guilty to be returned, you know what my fate must be unless you prevent it, which you can do by assisting me in this way. Send me (concealed in a common meat-pie, made in an oblong tin cheap dish) a saw file, six inches or so long, without a handle; place this at bottom of pie, embedded in under crust and gravy. And now, dearest, for the greater favour of the two. Send me in centre of a small cake, like your half-crown one, a tiny bottle of prussic acid, the smaller the better; this last I believe you could obtain from either Drs. Green or Cressy, for destroying a favourite cat. My darling, believe me when I say, as I hope for salvation, that this last should only be used the last night allowed me by the law to live, if it comes to that extremity. Never, while a chance of life remained, would I

use it, but only as a last resource. It would be no suicide in God's sight, I am sure. Dearest, I trust in this matter to you to aid me. I will face my trial as an innocent man should, and I believe God will restore me to you once more after this fearful lesson; but should He not, the file would give a chance of escape with life, while, if both failed, I should still save myself from dying a felon's death undeserved. By packing these, as I say, carefully, sending with them a tin of milk, &c., no risk will be incurred, as many things are, comparatively speaking, never examined. Get them yourself soon, and relieve me, and direct them in a feigned hand without any accompanying note. If you receive this safely and will aid me, by return send a post-card saying—'Dear P., Captain Lefroy has returned.' Send them by Friday morning at latest. If not P. A., get arsenic powder from Hart or other (or through Mrs. B.); wrap up in three or four pieces of paper. God bless you, darling. I trust you trust me. I can conceal several small things about me in safety."

A good deal of Lefroy's character is revealed in the foregoing. Cunning, hypocrisy, and the power to lie like truth, are all very apparent. He felt that his doom was certain when he penned that truly remarkable letter; though how he expected that the possession of a file would have enabled him to break out of Maidstone Jail is inexplicable. The prussic acid or arsenic powder, could he have got hold of them, would have been a more effectual means of cheating the hangman. But his wish was not to be gratified, as will be gathered from the answer that was sent to his letter. That answer was dated October 23, 1881, and it ran as

follows. It was written in a very womanly hand, with a great deal of underlining of words, but the writer was evidently a person of some education.

"My ever dearest Percy,—

"I am writing this, hoping that . . . . will do me the great kindness of taking it to you, because I may not have another opportunity. First, I must tell you that the delay about what you mentioned has happened through our being told that only two shops in London make them, but trust before you have this it will have arrived safely; if so, say in your next. The little basket with butter, &c., came safely. As to the other thing, oh, my darling, my heart is almost torn with agony as to what to do about it. To think that I should be the means of putting you out of the world, or to think it is I who leave you to an awful fate. Darling, can a suicide repent? What is anything compared to our future happiness or misery? God can and will pardon all sins, the blackest and worst, if we are only sorry, and believe in His power to save; but how about one you have no time to be sorry in? In any case, I could not get it from those you mention, nor the P.A. from Hart. If I were alone, no risk I incurred for your sake I should think of for a moment; but it would be dreadful for the poor little ones were I taken from them for years, as I should surely be were it traced. I thought of Julia, but do not know whether it would be safe; say what you think. If the worst happens, shall we be allowed to see you once in a room? It would be time then. Darling, you know I would do anything for you I could, or that would not be bad for you; but your soul is dearer and more precious than your body, and my one great and, indeed, only comfort

will be in looking forward to the time when we shall meet again. My love, if it were not for this hope my misery would be unbearable. Oh, do turn to Him in this time of awful trouble; His arms are open to you. Whatever the verdict of the world may be, our dear mothers will rejoice to have you; only confess all you have to confess to Him, who is able to save to the uttermost, and believe in His love. You know you have done many wrong things, and might gone from bad to worse if this frightful calamity had not stopped you. I think, certainly, you have had some bad friend, and would be glad to know this—was it Lambton? Are you shielding anybody? My theory is this. Wanting means, the sight of the * * * * * was a great temptation, and unexpected resistance caused the rest; if this is correct some time or other say, 'What you surmised in your last is, I fancy, correct,' or something like that, so that I may understand. My own dear one, I cannot fancy it pre-arranged, but of course I know something about the * * * * * * that no no one else does, and it is that in a great measure that fills me with such sickening dread and wretchedness for your sake. My darling, what did you want money so much for? Wouldn't it be a comfort to tell some one everything you know? I would guard your honour as my own, and all would be safe with me. Think it over, and if what we dread happens, write me a few lines by Mr. —— who, I know, will give it to me unopened. In any case, your name and memory will ever be amongst those most-loved and cherished by our dear little ones, as well as ourselves, who know and love you now. Do you still wish for a likeness of V. C.? One thing more. Has anything I have ever said or done, or left unsaid or undone, helped you to do wrong? I feel bitterly that I have

not been the friend I might have been in speaking more openly, &c., but I feared to hurt your feelings. Good-bye, my dearest, dearest Percy. Pray without ceasing that you may yet be restored to us in this world. God bless and comfort you.

"Your ever-loving and heart-broken,

"ANNIE.

"P.S.—I have tried through Smith to get a witness for third person, but as yet have failed. All I can do I will, you may be sure. My belief in your innocence is genuine, for I feel certain it was not intended. If by any merciful chance you succeeded with the implement, how should we know to bring you things, &c. ?"

Now, there are several points that will strike the observant reader as he peruses this astounding epistle, and he will naturally ask what manner of woman was it who could write in such a strain to a brutal, cold-blooded murderer such as Lefroy was. She lavishes on him all sorts of endearing epithets, and talks about his "honour" and his "innocence," but never a sigh of sorrow does she breathe for the murdered man, never a word of sympathy for his broken-hearted widow and his distressed relatives. The love of a woman passeth comprehension, but a woman who could lavish love on such a wretch as Lefroy was only a degree less wicked than he. In the spaces where she did not insert words she put in stars, and it is not a difficult matter to fill up the following. My theory is this:—"Wanting means, the sight of the * * * * * was a great temptation." The five stars stand for the word *money*. Then again, take the following passage:—"My own dear one, I cannot fancy it was pre-arranged,

but, of course, I know something about the * * * * * * that no one else does." Here the starred space should stand for the word *murder*, so that it was obvious and certain that during the time he was hiding from justice in her house, he told her about the crime; nevertheless she did all she could to screen him from the penalty of his sin, and talked in her letter about his mother being glad to see him in heaven; and that God's arms were open to him. The Pharisaism almost makes one shudder. Then in a postscript she says:—"I have tried through Smith to get a witness for third person, but as yet have failed." The meaning of this is very clear indeed when read together with the story Lefroy told on arrival at Preston Park station. He stated that there had been a third person in the carriage with him; "an elderly man," who had attacked him. Now, "ever-loving and heart-broken Annie" had been endeavouring, as proved by her own words, to get some one who would perjure his immortal soul by swearing that he had seen a third person in the carriage, but this false witness was not forthcoming; and not the file, nor prussic acid, nor arsenic powder was to save a brutal and callous criminal from a well-merited doom.

These two letters would never have been known of, had it not been for the fact that "Annie's" to the prisoner was discovered by a warder concealed beneath the mattress, in the cell occupied by Lefroy, and when it was brought under official notice, Annie was compelled to give up the prisoner's letter to her. It may be imagined she did that very reluctantly. But had she not done so she would very likely have got into serious trouble. It is difficult to understand how the person who smuggled the letters in and out of the

prison was not called to account. There seems, indeed, to have been a good deal of carelessness, for Lefroy himself in his letter to Annie says that his things were hardly examined. It may be necessary to explain here that an untried prisoner is privileged to have delicacies in the shape of food sent to him by his friends, and unless strict vigilance is exercised over these things, they may be made the means of imparting secret communications. The file asked for by Lefroy was, I believe, actually forwarded to him, but, of course, he had no chance of using it. Annie, who sent it to him, however, quite believed that it was more than possible for him to make his escape; and can any one doubt, after reading her letter, that had he done so she would have used all her woman's wit and cunning to prevent his recapture?

De gustibus non est disputandum—There is no disputing about taste, says the Latin proverb; and certainly the taste that induced this misguided young woman to cling to and believe in a rascal so depraved, so vulgar, and so barbarous as the murderer of Mr. Gold is beyond explanation.

The trial commenced on the 5th of November, 1881, fully four months after the crime was committed. The judge was the Lord Chief Justice, Sir John Coleridge, and the prosecution was conducted by Sir Henry James, Q.C., M.P., the Attorney-General, assisted by Mr. Poland and Mr. A. L. Smith. The Court was crowded to suffocation, and many ladies were present. The extraordinary vanity of the accused may be gathered from a request he made that his dress suit should be redeemed from pledge, and that he should be allowed to wear it during his trial. Of course this vanity was not gratified, and he appeared in

Court dressed in a closely-buttoned frock-coat, and he carried in his hand a new pot hat which some silly person had supplied him with. He displayed during the whole of the trial the utmost solicitude for this hat, and on one or two occasions he actually polished it up with his handkerchief. He made a desperate attempt to appear nonchalant, and sometimes he would smile at the evidence. But his white haggard face betrayed the true state of his mind, and those who were responsible for his safeguarding knew that he suffered from such terrible nervousness that he could not sleep at night, and had to be supplied with stimulants.

Throughout his incarceration he had never ceased to declare his innocence, and to express his opinion that it was certain he would be acquitted. If that was really what he himself thought he must have been strangely ignorant of the evidence that was to be brought against him, but as day after day he heard it unfolded in the course of the trial, he could not help feeling as he retired each night to his felon's couch that another strand had been woven of the rope that was to hang him. There were two remarkably damning facts which could not be explained away. The one was his taking the revolver out of pledge; the other his having the murdered man's watch and chain in his shoe when he got out at Preston Park. Yet it is a fact that Montagu Williams, for the defence, tried with might and main to get the theory accepted that the watch and chain had been put into Lefroy's shoe by a third man—that is, the mysterious elderly party who, according to the prisoner, was the man who did the deed; and he suggested, did Williams, that there was absolutely nothing improbable in this theory. Then he tried to sweep away the other fact about the redemption of the pistol, by denouncing the

pawnbroker who swore to it as a liar. Truly, a lawyer's trade is a miserable one.

It is doubtful if during his eventful career Montagu Williams ever made a lamer, more illogical, or poorer speech than that he delivered at Maidstone in defence of Lefroy. But the Lord Chief Justice was not a man to be influenced by commonplace platitudes, by maudlin sentiment, or by stereotyped references to the Almighty; and he resolved that the jury should not be if he could help it. For in his truly powerful summing-up he tore into shreds the rotten fabric of the defence, and proved conclusively that some of the chief witnesses on that side had deliberately lied. It was seen from the very first the view that the Judge took; and, in fact, no man with any intelligence could take any other, for evidence against a prisoner was never more decisive, more overwhelming and incontrovertible than it was against Lefroy. If any of the jury had really been influenced by Mr. Montagu Williams' rigmarole they were entirely changed by the Judge, and after a very short retirement they returned into Court with a verdict of "Guilty!"

When the prisoner heard that pronouncement of his inevitable doom all his assumed stoicism gave way, and his face became of a sickly greenish hue. He grasped the rail of the dock like a man who was dazed and about to fall. Indeed, he did really stagger and reel, and would have fallen if he had not seized the rail with a convulsive energy.

With awful and impressive solemnity the Judge assumed the black cap, and in appropriate and telling words he pointed out to Lefroy that all hope for him in this world had gone, and he characterized the murder as a foul and cruel one. Then with visible emotion he sentenced him to be hanged.

When the Judge ceased speaking the prisoner, who had listened to the sentence as if he was under some strange and dreadful spell, slowly raised his right arm, and pointing his finger at the jury, he exclaimed in a hollow voice—"Some day, when too late, you will learn that you have murdered me."

This little speech made not the slightest effect on any one who heard it; and a jailor laying his hand on the convicted murderer's shoulder told him to leave the dock. Then Lefroy, with a look of blank despair in his white face glanced about the Court, and particularly at a woman who sat weeping bitterly. The sight appeared to be too much for him, and, turning quickly, he hurried from the dock.

On reaching his cell he had evidently made up his mind to play the character of the unjustly condemned, for he reiterated again and again that he was innocent, and that his life had been sworn away. Of course before many days had passed the usual amount of crazy sentiment began to display itself amongst a certain class of people, and the convict's solicitor set to work to try and obtain a reprieve. But when the Judge told Lefroy to expect no mercy in this world he knew what he was saying. The murder was too deliberately planned, too brutal, to admit of any plea for mercy being listened to.

Quickly the days sped away. The dreadful shadow pressed more heavily on the convict, and as it came nearer and nearer, he gave way to despair, and his last night on earth was a restless one, passed in fitful slumbers and a feverish tossing to and fro, as if the spirit of his victim haunted him.

It was a dreary, bitterly cold winter morning when poor Mr. Gold's brutal slayer was led forth to die the

death so justly awarded to him for his crime. He was pallid as marble, and his sunken cheeks and bleared eyes told too surely of the mental agony he had endured. His hardened nature was touched, and he had been tortured by remorse. It is satisfactory to know that he confessed his crime, and acknowledged the full justice of his sentence.

Any one who followed the evidence carefully, and read it with an unbiassed mind, could not fail to come to the conclusion that if ever a criminal deserved his fate, Percy Mapleton Lefroy did. Attempts were made to show that he had acted upon a sudden and uncontrollable impulse in committing the murder, but the evidence conclusively proved that the crime was deliberately planned. For years he had been an idle, vanity-stricken loafer, with no disposition whatever for honest work, and he had endeavoured over and over again to cheat tradespeople by passing off upon them bad money, and on the day that he committed the murder, several flash sovereigns where found in his possession when he was searched at Preston Park. The sympathy, therefore, that was got up in his behalf during the time he was lying under sentence of death was entirely wasted on a worthless object.

He committed a most horrible murder, the wickedness of which could not be mitigated on any grounds; and he who slays his brother in cold blood must die. *Ita lex scripta est.*

THE MELVILLE POISONING CASE.

It was once said by a very wise and upright Judge that of all the crimes of which human nature is capable, secret poisoning is the most horrible and the most detestable. The truth of this no one will attempt to gainsay. Secret poisoning means a very cold-blooded and deliberate planning to destroy life—that greatest of God's gifts—and against it the victim is utterly powerless, for there is no fore-warning, no sudden uprising of passion, no sudden attack. The criminal is silent, secret, and mysterious; and as the deadly tropical snake glides without a sound from beneath some bush or tuft of grass to strike his prey, so does the poisoner proceed with the same deadly and insidious stealthiness to destroy him or her whom he has decided to remove. Formerly the way of the poisoner was easier, for science had not taught us what we now know, and consequently the fear of detection was considerably less than at present. But even now, given a certain amount of skill combined with extraordinary caution, and a crime may be accomplished with, comparatively speaking, little risk to the criminal. The case I am about to relate is of this class, and it has in it all the elements of mystery and no little romance. At the time it caused a very great sensation, and was something more than a nine days' wonder. For me it had a peculiar interest, and in going over my notes made at the time I find that the story reads like some wild imagining of an Edgar Allan Poe. But real and everyday life presents

us with truths which very frequently make fiction seem ridiculous beside them. I propose to tell this tale without any embellishments or the use of any florid language, but it matters not how homely the language, or how matter of fact the way in which it is written, it must ever read like a page of romance.

A generation has passed since the events occurred which I am about to record. At that time there stood —and for aught I know to the contrary there stands now—a quaint and rambling old house in a sequestered vale in the Border country, and within about ten miles walk of Carlisle. It was known as Shot Castle. It was a castellated building with a massive square tower or keep, and this part of the building, at least, was very ancient. The name of the house had its origin, I believe, in the fact that in some far off period during an attack that was made upon the place a round of shot struck the tower and lodged in the wall, where for many and many a long year it was to be seen by the curious. But when I was last at the castle, the tower, and indeed nearly the whole of the building, was covered with a massive and dense growth of ivy, so that even if there had been a hundred round shot embedded in the walls the casual observer would not have noticed them.

It is beyond doubt that Shot Castle was very old, and there was a tradition current, though whether based upon any sound data or not I do not know, that James V. of Scotland passed a night there when on his way to the fatal and, for the Scotch, disastrous field of Flodden. I am aware, of course, that the same distinction has been claimed for a good many of the Border castles, and probably if the claims came to be sifted they would be found to rest on no better foundation than the fossilized gossip of country yokels. But there was one very

singular incident in connection with Shot Castle which had a good deal more than tradition to recommend it, as the records of the time will prove. It was this. The basement was a series of vaulted cellars, or perhaps I may be allowed to say dungeons; for there was ample evidence forthcoming that at some period or other two at least of these cellars had been used for the detention of prisoners. A third, at a more recent date, had served as a wine-cellar. This one, roughly speaking, was built in the form of a Maltese cross, but one of the arms of the cross had been bricked up for some purpose which had puzzled a good many occupants of the Castle, though no one seems to have had the curiosity to investigate the cause.

On one occasion, however, when the place became vacant it was decided by the owner to enlarge this particular cellar by clearing out the bricked-up arm of the cross, and men were set to work for that purpose. The first blows of the pick soon convinced them that there was a hollow behind. The foreman, therefore, counselled them to proceed with caution, as probably the recess had been used as a hiding-place for treasure during some of the troubled times through which the Border country passed. When they broke through the wall, however, instead of finding treasure, a very ghastly and strange revelation was made. They discovered the skeleton of a man of gigantic stature clad in a complete suit of armour, which was evidently of fifteenth-century make. It was in a crumbling condition from rust and age, and it and the skeleton fell to pieces on being removed, although every care was exercised to preserve them. What was remarkable, however, was this—the armour lacked the helmet and the skeleton its head, and investigation of these mortal remains proved that the

man had been decapitated before his body was bricked up in the recess. Who he was, why he had been beheaded, and why immured will never be known. It is an unsolved secret belonging to the dead past, and the dead speak not, and no sign ever comes from the world of death to guide us in our investigations. All that can be surmised is that the giant had probably been murdered or secretly executed, and those responsible for his death, having cause to fear detection, had bricked his body up, where ages after it was found by the modern workmen, and in the way I have mentioned.

Of course it was impossible to keep the news of a discovery of this kind from spreading, and spread it did like wildfire over the country side, and as it flew from lip to lip it received additions like the story of the black crow, and it was not long before people had conjured up a ghost; for how could a castle where a headless corpse in armour had been immured for such a length of time remain without a ghost? Such a thing was not to be thought of. It was simply preposterous, so a ghost came accordingly. Now, it seems incredible, but it is nevertheless true, that this silly ghost, which had its birth in the imagination of the yokels, frightened all comers away, and Shot Castle actually remained tenantless, save by the rats, for a period of something like twenty years, to the serious loss of the proprietors. The estate round about, which consisted of close on forty acres, would have been cut up for building purposes had there been any possibility of the buildings finding purchasers or tenants; but such a possibility was too remote for the venture to be tried, as the railway and nearest town were far off, and the valley was too secluded to attract a colony; so Shot Castle remained in its loneliness, and the finger of decay began to trace its

markings upon it. The tower and the mantling ivy were the refuge and home of innumerable bats, birds, and owls. The country folk shunned this haunted dwelling at night as they would have done a pest-house; and in the day time they passed it with many a side glance of nervous dread, as if half expecting to hear some horrible sound, or see the walls rend open revealing some appalling sight that would be death to him who beheld it. Indeed, current local gossip averred with much solemnity that a headless corpse had repeatedly been seen walking to and fro on the terrace in front of the house. And I myself talked to people, who in all other respects were sane and intelligent enough, who declared on their honour that they had several times seen this gruesome sight.

But all things come to an end, and so at last a family were found who were bold enough to enter into possession of Shot Castle in spite of ghost and spooks. It appeared that a Colonel John Drakeworth Melville —a good old name—secured the place on a lease for seven years at a low rental, the landlord being only too glad to let it so that the spell might be broken.

Colonel Melville's family consisted of his wife, a lady only half his age; his son, Walter Drakeworth, the issue of his first wife—for he had been married twice—and his daughter by his second wife. Several servants were kept, including a nurse—an Italian — named Cornelia Cortazzi. The son, who was about eighteen years of age, was a cripple. He had some affection of the spine, which also affected his left leg, so that he walked lame, and could not walk at all without the aid of a stick. In spite of this, and though he looked delicate, he seemed to enjoy good health. He had a handsome, intelligent face that beamed with kindness

and good will, and it soon became known that he had a passionate love for all living things. He was highly intelligent, and of a most studious nature, fond of botanizing and naturalizing; and it was said that his power over animals was so great that he had been known to tame a wild cat, and had trained foxes to follow him about like dogs. It was understood that he was his father's idol, but his stepmother's aversion, though nobody either then or after was able to produce one iota of evidence, in a legal sense, why his mother disliked him, even if it was true that she did dislike him. But there is a good old saying, which is something like a proverb, that "what everybody says must be true," and so it is highly probable that the common belief was justified. However, I shall have occasion to refer to that later on.

The daughter of the house, Jessie Drakeworth—the latter being the family name—was a pretty, fair-haired child of six or thereabouts, who was almost constantly in the care of Cornelia Cortazzi, a young woman of about five-and-twenty, short in stature, dark as a raven, and remarkably handsome. The Colonel, before coming to Shot Castle, had lived for some time at Spezzia, where little Jessie was born, and there Cornelia had been engaged as her nurse. Mrs. Melville was not very much older than the nurse. She was a tall, slim, handsome woman, fair as a lily, with steel-blue eyes, a complexion like a peach, dark eyebrows, and hair of a light shade of yellow gold. The Colonel was a grisly veteran, on the wrong side of sixty, who had seen much service in India. His face was bronzed to the colour of copper, but his hair and moustache were as white as driven snow. He bore his years well; was as straight as a poplar, and walked with a stately, martial step.

Naturally enough in such a sparsely populated neighbourhood, as things human go, there was much curiosity expressed to know all about the ins and outs and the comings and goings of this family. This vein of curiosity is much more prominent and more largely developed in Northern people than in those of the South, and frequently it becomes offensive. Possibly the Melvilles felt it to be so, and resented it, for they kept their affairs studiously to themselves, and the gossip about them was no doubt largely invention based on a small substratum of truth. What was really known was this. The Colonel was frequently in London, where, as was understood, he had some business relations, and was the chairman of one or two public companies. And very frequently when he was away, his wife went away also; but she went north to Edinburgh, so it was said. It was remarked that she invariably left after he did, and as invariably returned before he got back. There had been times, however, when she did not leave, but then there came to the house a gentleman about thirty years of age, of military bearing and very good looking. It would have been strange if these little details had not given rise to whispered scandal; though beyond mere appearances it does not seem that there was anything to warrant the things that were said. It is very human to speak evil, and for ill-guarded tongues to utter slander, and the folk thereabout were very human indeed.

It is worth recording, in fact it is necessary to record, that so far as outsiders could judge, the Melville family seemed a very united family, and to live in the closest amity; while Walter, by his gentle, amiable, and loving disposition, was universally esteemed and respected by the community among whom he dwelt.

He always had a good word and a smile for every one, and if he met an old man or old woman on the way carying a load, he would, cripple as he was, offer to help them; and to children he was like some good genius who said pleasant things and bestowed generous largess. Such a youth was sure to become popular, and, as a matter of course, "Master Walter" was a welcome guest at any farmhouse he liked to call at, and as welcome as the flowers in May at any wayside cottage.

For two years this state of matters continued, and then a strange and fearsome rumour ran that both Master Walter and his father, Colonel Melville, lay dead. They had died in the night after a few hours of agonizing suffering. A local doctor named Archibald Gordon had been called in, and messengers sent off post haste to Carlisle for a physician of repute—Dr. Philip Brinsmead. The local man did all that he could; and when Brinsmead arrived, he added his efforts and his skill to those of his colleague, but all was fruitless. Walter died at half-past five in the morning, and his father an hour later, and the cause of death was said to be poison. Neither of the medical men would take upon himself at the time to say what the poison was which had destroyed the lives of father and son, but each was convinced in his own mind that it was an undoubted case of poisoning.

The symptoms were the same in both patients. There were profuse vomiting, a consuming thirst, cracked, parched lips, a hard, dry tongue, cold sweatings, and intense and agonizing abdominal pains, followed by collapse, coma, and death. The symptoms would not yield in the slightest to any of the remedies tried, and the doctors exhausted their skill in trying to

ameliorate the sufferings of the poor fellows, but, alas! without avail.

Both father and son were questioned as to what they had partaken of likely in any way to have produced the illness, but each declared he had had nothing out of the ordinary. It appeared that Walter, then in his usual health, had hobbled about all the afternoon collecting butterflies and botanical specimens. The Colonel had driven into Carlisle to transact some business at his bank and other places, but returned home at half-past six, and at seven, the usual dinner-hour, he sat down to dine with his son and wife and a Mrs. Whortleberry, a neighbour, who lived about five miles away, and who had dropped in that afternoon on a visit to Mrs. Melville, and been persuaded to stay to dinner, the Colonel undertaking to drive her home afterwards. It was summer-time, and the days long, the weather beautiful. The butler—John Hulton—and a parlour-maid—Sophie Baxter—waited at the table. Mrs. Whortleberry never took anything stronger than water, but Mrs. Melville, the Colonel, and his son had a pint of champagne between them; and the father and son drank two or three glasses of claret. The dinner consisted of soup, of which all partook; part of a very fine salmon which the Colonel had brought back with him from Carlisle, a couple of roast fowls, a piece of beef, the usual vegetables and sweets, salad and cheese, with apples, pears, and nuts for dessert; and during dessert the two gentlemen each drank a glass of old port, and smoked a mild cigar, as was their custom.

An hour later the Colonel, who had already ordered the horse to be put to the gig, was drawing on a light overcoat, preparatory to driving his lady guest home, when he suddenly complained of intense internal pains

and almost immediately vomited. A few minutes later the son rang his bell violently—he had previously retired to his room—and on a chambermaid rushing up, she found him writhing on the floor in great pain, and he had vomited freely. He said that something had disagreed with him, and he asked for a drink of soda water, which was given to him.

In the meantime the Colonel, who had drunk a glass of cold water, said he felt better, but before he could get out to the gig, which stood ready at the door, he was seized again with a paroxysm. The alarm in the house now became general, and Mrs. Melville appeared to be in a terrible state of distress; and though both father and son protested as not being necessary, she insisted on sending immediately for the local doctor; and Mrs. Wortleberry, in the hope that she might be able to render some service, and also being very anxious about her friends, volunteered to stay all night—and she sent a message by one of the servants to her people to that effect.

When Dr. Gordon arrived he at once recognized the gravity of the symptoms in each case, and without suggesting poison to any one, although he had no doubt his patients were suffering from poison, he requested Mrs. Melville to send a mounted messenger with all possible speed to Dr. Brinsmead, of Carlisle, and request him to come at once. Mrs. Melville, who seemed almost frantic with grief and distress, at once despatched the groom, and told him not to spare the horse, but gallop all the way. In an almost incredibly short space of time Dr. Brinsmead arrived, having ridden out; for, in addition to the verbal message, Dr. Gordon had written a little note, in which he said it was a matter of life and death.

While waiting for the arrival of his colleague, Gordon had done everything he could possibly think of for the two sufferers, but without in any way being able to lessen the violence of the symptoms; and when Brinsmead came and had gone into the matter for a few minutes, he said very gravely to his brother practitioner—

"This is a serious case of poisoning, and I fear our patients are doomed."

He then gave orders that everything likely to be of service in the case was to be secured, and he closely questioned the two men with a view to elicit if possible some facts likely to be of use in guiding those whose duty it would be to inquire into the matter. But the sufferers had no information to give beyond stating what they had eaten and drunk at dinner, nor could they suggest any one in the household, who, actuated by malice, spite, envy, jealousy, or other cause, would have resorted to such a dreadful way of giving expression to their feelings as committing a double murder. But before he died the Colonel made use of a very extraordinary remark. At first he was not informed of his son's illness, but when it was seen that the poor lad could not live, the news was conveyed to the suffering father, who, though in a terrible state himself, insisted on seeing his dying boy. Consequently he was placed on a camp-chair and carried to Walter's room, and when he beheld the dying youth he burst into tears and could not speak for a few moments, when he collected himself, and, pressing his son's hand, said fiercely—"This is the she-devil's work! May God wither her!"

Dr. Brinsmead immediately asked him to whom he referred, but he made no answer. He seemed utterly

overwhelmed and dazed. A quarter of an hour later the son died. By that time the Colonel was all but unconscious himself, and though every effort was made to get some explanation from him as to what he meant when he said "This is the she-devil's work," he appeared to be incapable of comprehending the questions addressed to him, for collapse had come. Coma was already setting in, and about an hour after the son had breathed his last the father had joined him in the solemn and awful silence of death.

Such was the mysterious and terrible case which alarmed the neighbourhood, and which, in the interests of justice and truth, I was called upon to investigate.

I could not be indifferent to the fact that it was a very grave business indeed that I had in hand, for it was as clear as daylight that the two men had not died a natural death. That was an idea that did not suggest argumentative consideration for a single brief instant. Death in each case was beyond doubt the result of poison, and what had to be determined was whether the poison had been administered wilfully with a view to destroying them, or whether it had got into their bodies accidentally.

The Coroner's inquiry was opened at Carlisle, and it was seen from the first that the case was no ordinary one, but was surrounded with a great deal of mystery. To summarize the evidence that was given at the first sitting of the Coroner's Court, it may be briefly put thus:—

The doctors declared that death was due to poison, but at that stage they could not say what the poison was. Brinsmead, however, expressed a cautious opinion that the symptoms were identical with those set up by black antimony, though he admitted he had never seen a case

of poisoning by black antimony, and his knowledge of the action of the drug was derived from reading. As a matter of fact, comparatively speaking, very little was known in an ordinary way about black antimony at that period, and researches into its effects had been confined to professors of medical jurisprudence, and it was only dealt with at length in the class-books on toxicology. The poison, so it would seem, must have been taken by the father and son during the dinner, and that being so, all the appearances pointed to a wilful administration, otherwise how was it the rest of the people did not suffer?

It was very natural that the doctors should suspect the wine as having been the medium by which the poison was given. Now, it was hardly likely that it could have been the champagne, and of the claret some still remained in the decanter, and to all appearance was free from anything of a deleterious nature. Subsequent analysis proved this to be correct. The port wine, therefore, fell under grave suspicion, a suspicion which was intensified when it was found that the decanter which had held it had been drained with the exception of about a teaspoonful. Yet it was stated that a glass or two still remained when the gentlemen rose from the table.

John Hulton, the butler, swore that when he put the port wine decanter on the table after the dinner it did not contain much more than half a bottleful, as it was what remained from the previous day, and the half bottle was consumed by the two gentlemen, with the exception, perhaps, of a couple of glasses. He asked the Colonel just before dinner commenced if he should open another bottle, and was told no. The Colonel did not like to have his wine opened very long before it was

wanted. He was a connoisseur of wine, and a bit "faddy" about it.

Hulton was an exceedingly intelligent, quiet, and reserved middle-aged man. He had been in the Colonel's service just two years, and previous to that had fulfilled an engagement with the late Lord Coltville for twenty years as butler. He was a widower with one daughter, who was at school. The following was his evidence at the inquest. I give it in the first person, and almost verbatim, as it is very important.

"My name is John Hulton. I shall be fifty next birthday. I have been with Colonel Melville for two years. I went into his service immediately after the death of my late master, Lord Coltville. I always regarded Colonel Melville as an exceedingly nice gentleman, who had the greatest consideration for every one about him."

Asked if he thought any of the servants had a spite against him, he answered emphatically—

"Indeed I do not. I am sure there wasn't a servant in the house but what would have done anything for him. He was a most gentle man, and no one could help loving him. He was passionately attached to his son, and they were very much together when at home."

"Do you know if there was any difference between him and his wife?"

"I don't think they agreed very well."

"What are your reasons for thinking so?"

"They had not occupied the same room for a long time, and I have frequently noticed at the table that there was a coolness between them. Mrs. Melville seemed to sulk, and refuse to talk to him, but they were pretty guarded in the presence of the servants."

"Can you speak to any open quarrel ever having taken place to your knowledge?"

"No; but one evening I entered the drawing-room for the purpose of lighting the lamps. Not knowing that any one was there, I entered without knocking, and just as I opened the door I heard the Colonel say with a sigh—'Maude, this must end. I cannot endure it; it is embittering and poisoning my whole life.' They were both seated on a sofa, and Mrs. Melville was weeping, and had her handkerchief pressed to her eyes. I was about to withdraw, when the Colonel saw me, and exclaimed—'Is that you, Hulton? Come in, come in.' Then he got up and left the room hurriedly, and, as it seemed to me, in great agitation. Immediately he had had gone, his wife jumped up and said angrily—'What business had you to come in without knocking?' Before I had time to make any reply, she stamped her foot, and, dragging her handkerchief through her clenched hand in a fretful, passionate sort of way, she murmured—'Oh! what a blind, stupid fool I have been;' and she, too, hurriedly left the room. Having lighted the lamps and drawn the curtains, I was about to retire, when I thought I heard something move behind a large screen that stood in a recess. At first I thought it might be the cat or Flossie, the spaniel, but when I reached the door some feeling I cannot account for induced me to turn back and look behind the screen, when to my surprise I saw Miss Cortazzi there. She was very much confused on being discovered, and her face was scarlet with passion.

"'What are you doing there?' I asked sternly, for it was evident she had been playing the spy.

"'What has that to do with you, you meddlesome fool?' she answered.

"I told her I would acquaint my master with the fact that she had been playing the spy, and she said to me that if I did it would be the worse for me. Then she changed her manner and tone, and beseeched me to say nothing for peace sake. She assured me that Mrs. Melville had requested her to hide behind the screen, so that she might be a witness to what passed, as Mrs. Melville knew that her husband was going to find fault with her. As I did not wish to be mixed up in any of the family quarrels, I resolved to take no further notice of this incident, and so the matter was dropped. On the day that master and his son died I open a fresh bottle of claret for luncheon. The remains of that bottle were used for dinner. I did not open any fresh port wine, as the Colonel did not always take it, and he did not like it to stand in the decanter very long. Just before the family assembled at dinner I had occasion to go into the dining-room, and as I entered at one door, I saw another door at the farther end of the room close abruptly, as if some one had gone out hurriedly, and I noted that a small portion of a woman's dress was shut in. In a moment the door was opened again for a few inches, then closed as soon as the dress had been released. I haven't the remotest idea who the person was."

"The dining-room is a large one, is it not?"

"Yes. It is about twenty-seven feet long."

"We want you to describe the room to us."

"It has three doors. One gives entrance from the main hall. The other from a long passage that leads to the kitchen and butler's pantry. The other communicates with a smoking-room. The room is lighted by two oriel windows, with large square recesses."

"Which door had you entered by when you saw the retreating figure?"

"By the door from the hall."

"And which doorway did the supposed woman go through?"

"That communicating with the smoking-room."

"That is to say, at the other end of the room to you?"

"Yes."

"Is there any other way out from the smoking-room?"

"Yes, by way of a small conservatory on to a lawn; and by another door communicating with a passage and flight of stairs going to the upper part of the house."

"Did you attach any importance to the disappearing figure?"

"Not at the time. I thought it might have been one of the maids."

"After the death of your master and his son, did you recall the incident?"

"I did when I heard that the two gentlemen had died from poison."

"Then you quite thought the wine had been tampered with?"

"Well—I thought it was possible it might have been."

"And did you think it possible that the retreating figure was the person who might have tampered with the wine?"

"I fancy that I vaguely connected the two things."

"And did you form any impression in your own mind as to who the person was whom you saw, or fancied you saw, leave the room?"

This question was objected to, and so not pressed;

and Hulton was next asked if he could say what colour the piece of dress was that he saw in the doorway, but he replied that he could not, as the distance was too great; moreover, it was withdrawn very rapidly. When the person found she had shut her dress in, she opened the door again immediately.

Cornelia Cortazzi was the next witness called. She was a most striking-looking woman, and was regarded with much curiosity and interest. She did not speak English perfectly, and sometimes had a difficulty in making herself understood, when she would rattle away in her own sweet musical Italian, and afterwards translate into English, after a fashion. She was asked if she was aware of any unhappiness between her master and mistress, and she replied that she had known that the Colonel was exceedingly jealous of his wife, though, as she believed, without cause or justification of any kind. The Colonel used to get very angry with his wife, and not only abuse her in violent language, but threaten her. Asked to explain the incident of the screen, when she was discovered hiding there by the butler, she said—

"My master and mistress had been quarrelling during the day, and he had told his wife he wished to see her alone in the drawing-room after dinner. Upon this my mistress, who was afraid of her husband, secretly asked me to conceal myself behind the screen, in case he attempted any violence, when I was to scream and alarm the household."

"But he was not violent?"

"No, not exactly. That is, he didn't beat her."

"Well, now, as you were an ear-witness, can you tell the Court what passed between the lady and gentleman?"

"He accused her of deceiving him, and she was very indignant, saying it was a lie. He then called her some bad names, and she wept, poor thing, very bitterly, and told him that he made her life perfectly miserable with his unjust suspicions."

"So far as you know, were the suspicions unfounded?"

"Yes, I am sure they were."

"Has your mistress ever made you her confidante?"

"Oh! dear, no! but she has been very kind to me."

"And you sympathized with her?"

"Yes."

"And would you have helped her, had she needed help, in any way you could?"

"Certainly."

"Now, as a matter of fact, Miss Cortazzi, do you know whether or not she has had a secret lover?"

"I know nothing whatever about it," exclaimed the witness indignantly.

"Do you know if she has ever been visited by a gentleman during her husband's absence?"

"I do not know."

"You will swear that?"

"Yes; as often as you like."

"Do you know if she was in the habit of going away during her husband's absence?"

"I believe once or twice she did go away."

"Where did she go to?"

"How can I tell you that?"

"But did she not inform you?"

"Certainly not."

"Then you have no idea what her object was in leaving her home unknown to her husband?"

"Not the slightest idea."

"And you never had the curiosity to try and find out?"

"Of course not. What business had I to poke my nose into my mistress's affairs?"

"You perhaps had no business to do so, but servants sometimes do pry, you know."

"Well, I am not one of them."

"Do you know if your mistress was fond of her stepson?"

"As far as I know she was."

"Did she ever speak unkindly of him in your presence?"

"No."

"You are sure of that?"

"Quite sure."

"Were you in the dining-room on the day that the Colonel and his son died?"

"No."

"Not once."

"Not just before dinner?"

"I have told you not once," exclaimed the witness, with flashing eyes, while her face burned scarlet with anger, for it will be seen that the question was suggestive, and the witness was not indifferent to that.

"Then if it were suggested that you were seen hurriedly retreating from the room just before dinner, it would be false?"

"It would be a shameful lie!" came the emphatic answer.

Miss Cortazzi was allowed to step down from the witness-box. She had proved what lawyers called "a tough witness," and not much had been made of her; but there was a general feeling that she had a good deal in

reserve, and knew very much more than she cared to reveal, while cross-examination had failed to make her reveal it. She had given her evidence with great deliberation and self-possession, with the exception of once or twice when she lost her temper at being asked questions that she considered wounded her dignity. But the impression made on my mind—for I was present and heard all the evidence—was that this loss of temper was assumed for a purpose. Of course I might have been wrong, but such was my impression, and I mention it.

The next witness called was the widow, who was dressed in deep mourning and seemed overwhelmed with grief. She corroborated the Italian maid about the screen incident, and also about her not being in her mistress's confidence. Mrs. Melville insisted that she was very fond indeed of her stepson, though he was not always kind to her, for he supported his father in his absurd jealousy. When she went away while her husband was in London, she went to Edinburgh to stay with a relative, a Mrs. Campbell, who was her half-cousin, and the wife of an Edinburgh lawyer. (This was subsequently confirmed.) As regards the gentleman who had been known to call upon her during the absence of her husband, she resolutely declined to say who he was. She declined to mix him up in the case. He had called upon her on private business, and was almost an utter stranger to her. She herself had sent for the doctor as soon as she heard that her husband and his son were ill, though they both desired her not to do so. She was stricken with uncontrollable grief when she was informed how serious the illness was, and she had begged of Dr. Gordon to telegraph both to Glasgow and Edinburgh for the best doctors that could be

obtained, and tell them to come on by special train. But Dr. Gordon had said that course would be useless, and that if Dr. Brinsmead, of Carlisle, could not save the patients no one else could. Several other witnesses were examined, including all the servants, but nothing was elicited that justified a legal accusation being made against any individual.

The Coroner's Court was adjourned four different times to enable the medical evidence to be completed. The analytical work had been carried out in Edinburgh, and proved very conclusively that death in each case was entirely due to antimonial poisoning, a considerable quantity of the deadly drug, black antimony, being found in the stomach and intestines of both men. The few drops of port wine remaining in the decanter, and which was too small a quantity for analysis, was given to a rabbit. Symptoms of poisoning soon set up, and the rabbit died. When it was examined after death its stomach and intestines were found to be inflamed and ulcerated as in the case of the human beings.

Thus, then, there was conclusive evidence of two things. Firstly, Colonel Melville and his son had died of poison, and the poison used to produce death was black antimony, a powerful mineral poison which is very fatal to human beings, but may be given to horses almost with impunity. Secondly, the vehicle used for conveying the poison into the system of the victims was the port wine, of which both partook immediately after dinner.

Now, was it likely that the men put the poison into the wine themselves?

The only answer to this is—No.

Consequently it was not a case of suicide. Not being suicide, it might have been misadventure, but that was

so unlikely that it was not necessary to take it into consideration. So, not being misadventure nor suicide, it was murder—wilful murder. Murder of a cold-blooded, diabolical kind. Who was the murderer? The inquiry, long and exhaustive as it was, quite failed to fix the shadow of guilt on any one, and the verdict of the Coroner's Court was, "Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown." Of course, until that person or those persons were found the case could not go on to its next stage, as there was no one to send for trial, and it was no use having a trial without some person to try.

It was a mystery—a dark, and apparently unfathomable mystery. Every one felt that, and there was a generally expressed hope that the criminal might be brought to justice.

The Colonel and his son had been so universally beloved in the neighbourhood that their cruel death caused widespread sorrow and a feeling of intense irritation against the unknown criminal. Where was that criminal? There was one point as certain as anything was certain in the case—the murderer was a member of the household. One guilty brain at least amongst those who lived at that castle nursed the dark and corroding secret. Whose brain was it?

This was the problem set me, and upon which I went to work with a feeling that I should succeed in finding the correct solution. The tragedy had been played out to its ghastly end, but the motive and the murderer had yet to be discovered. The case was one of those strange stories in human history which read like thrilling melodrama, and yet when put into print are regarded by certain people as exaggerated fiction. In this particular instance it was perfectly obvious that

cunning and craft, malignant hatred, envy, or jealousy, had all worked to bring about the fatal result, and that result was the outcome of a cold, cruel, devilish plotting, which all too forcibly illustrated how hideously wicked human beings can be.

There were three or four points in connection with this remarkable case which were of the greatest importance, though they were only parts in the complicated puzzle. Firstly, Hulton swore that when the gentlemen rose from the dinner-table about two wine-glasses of port remained in the decanter. It was a small quantity, but sufficient for the purpose of analysis. Nevertheless, it had disappeared, and, if Hulton's evidence was to be believed, he had not made away with it, nor did he know how it had gone. The butler's pantry was a room about fourteen feet square in the passage leading from the dining-hall to the kitchen. Here he opened and decanted all his wine, and thither he removed all wine from the table when the meals were ended. It followed, therefore, that whoever emptied the wine out of the decanter after it had been removed on the fatal day had purposely gone to that pantry, and the same person who was so anxious to get rid of the remaining portion of wine was, presumably, the same person who had poisoned the wine before the unfortunate gentlemen sat down to partake of it. In the pantry was a lead-lined sink with a water-tap over it. Now, the natural conclusion to come to would be that the wine had been poured down that sink, and then washed away with water from the tap. But I elicited from Hulton that it was his custom, without exception, always to half-fill that sink with warm water, in which he put a little soft soap and soda, just before each meal, so that as the silver was removed from the table it was

at once transferred to the water in the sink in order that it might be washed immediately. He was very particular with respect to this duty, as, rightly or wrongly, he maintained that silver could not be kept in good condition unless it was washed at once after being used.

Now, taking it for granted that the water was in the sink when the person went there to get rid of the wine, it follows that the wine could not have been emptied down the sink. Consequently it must have been poured out elsewhere. In studying the place in search of aids to unravelling the mystery, I noted that the pantry was lighted by an oblong window opening doorwise on hinges by means of a flat iron bar attached to the bottom part of the window, and pierced with holes which fitted on a peg when the window was open, and thus kept it from being blown to. The opening of the window was protected against the entrance of burglars by two stout upright bars.

"Probably," thought I, "the poisoned wine was poured through that window."

So I went outside to the garden. The window was about ten feet from the ground. Beneath was an unkempt patch of rank weeds and ferns, for it was a neglected corner, being in an angle of the building and shut off from the sun. The weeds and ferns that grew in such rank profusion beneath the window I subjected to a most searching scrutiny, with the result that I detected some distinct traces of a coloured fluid on certain of the plants, and these I gathered with the greatest possible care, and wrapped them in sheets of clean, white letter-paper. This little matter I withheld from every one in the house, deeming it better for the time being to keep it secret.

At the earliest possible moment I sealed the packets and despatched them to Edinburgh to Professor Randal Muir, with a request that he would subject them to the severest test imaginable for traces of antimony. This poison being a heavy mineral, leaves in its sulphuretted form a blackish-grey sediment behind after being mixed with fluid, which adheres to anything upon which it may drop.

The next point of importance in the case was the evidence of Cornelia Cortazzi. I watched and studied this young woman very closely, and I was convinced she was a most excellent actress, with an extraordinary power of concealing the true state of her mind. When she swore that Mrs. Melville had never made a confidante of her I did not believe her. My own opinion was there were a good many secrets between the two women, and these secrets, if they could only be brought to light, would give us the key to the mystery.

Still another point was the evidence sworn to by Hulton to the effect that on entering the dining-room just before dinner on the fatal day, he saw signs of some one beating a hasty retreat by the door at the opposite end of the room, and that somebody was evidently a woman, because the tail of her dress got shut in between the door and the jamb, and in order to release it she had to re-open the door an inch or two. Now, unless this was false evidence—but there were no grounds whatever for supposing it was—it was terribly suggestive. It raised up a picture of a vindictive woman, with the demon Murder sitting in her heart, stealing into that room, and dropping the deadly drug into the port, and making her escape just in time to prevent the butler from seeing her. There was little reason to doubt that the wine was poisoned about that

time, for, be it remembered, the Colonel had drunk some of the same wine from the same decanter the previous evening at dinner and had suffered no ill effects. Studying the crime in all its aspects, the details pointed to a very deliberate, cool, and cruel planning, so that there should be no hitch and no escape for the victims. Two victims only were wanted, namely, the father and son, hence the reason that the port wine was selected as the vehicle in which to administer the deadly drug, for it was known to some at least, besides the butler, that the two gentlemen were the only ones in the house who drank port. After the dinner the poisoner hastened to get rid of the small quantity of the wine remaining in the decanter, hoping thereby to destroy all evidence, but entire success did not attend this effort.

So far, then, it was clearly established that Colonel Melville and his son died of antimonial poison; that the poison was put into the port wine which they drank at dinner, and that after dinner some one, who was evidently on the watch and keenly alert, slipped into the butler's pantry during the time that he was finishing his duties in the dining-room, and emptied out the remaining drops of port wine into the garden. In the course of a week I established the fact that the remaining wine had been poured out of the window, for I received the following note from Professor Muir :—

"Dear Mr. Donovan,—

"In accordance with your request I lost no time in very carefully examining the leaves of the plants which you transmitted to me in sealed packets. On placing these leaves under the microscope I discerned distinct traces of a dark-greyish gritty substance, which I

scraped on to a sheet of chemically pure white paper. The quantity thus collected was very small, and would hardly permit of analysis alone. I therefore adopted the following plan. I wetted the paper and the black gritty substance with muriatic acid. I then boiled the paper in two ounces of diluted muriatic acid, and by applying known tests to this acid, I proved the presence of metallic antimony, that is, sulphuret of antimony. Collecting the residuum left in the tube, I dissolved it in water, and then injected the fluid into the veins of a rabbit. Soon afterwards the animal was attacked with vomiting and purging, and within an hour it was dead. On opening the body I found considerable redness of the coats of the stomach and intestines. The lungs were also of an orange-red colour. They were gorged with blood, and dense. As these are the well-recognized symptoms of poisoning with the prepared sulphuret of antimony, or, as it is commonly termed, 'black antitomy,' I have no hesitation in declaring that that poison was on the leaves of the herbs you sent, and it had probably got there by some fluid containing the powder being poured over them."

The importance of this scientific evidence could not be overlooked, for it forged another valuable link in the evidence, since it was strong presumptive evidence that the person who poisoned the wine was a member of the household, and must have been well acquainted with the general routine and habits of the people.

So far all the signs—which to me were, like the handwriting on the wall, replete with startling significance—pointed to the criminal as being a woman The female servants consisted of a cook, a dairymaid, a little girl, aged thirteen, who assisted in the kitchen;

two chambermaids, a parlourmaid, a woman who did the washing (she was the gardener's wife), and Cornelia Cortazzi. Besides these females, there were in the house on the day of the murder Mrs. Melville and Mrs. Wortleberry. Of course, I will leave little Jessie out of the case altogether. After cautious investigation, I excluded all the female servants, with the exception of Cortazzi, from the category of "suspects." That is to say, there was nothing that I could suggest which would have justified suspicion attaching to them. We were, therefore, reduced to three females—Mrs. Wortleberry, Mrs. Melville, and Cortazzi. Mrs. Wortleberry was an old lady, greatly respected in the neighbourhood, professing great piety, and noted for her philanthropy. It was little less than absurd to suppose that she could have done the deed, or been a party to it in any way, so Mrs. Melville and Cortazzi alone remained. Nevertheless, the most patient and exhaustive inquiry before the coroner had quite failed to elicit a single fact that would have warranted either or both of these women being arrested. Necessarily I was driven into suspecting that they were in collusion and each accessory to the fact. Dreadful as it was to suppose that Mrs. Melville could have been so terribly wicked as to poison her husband and her crippled stepson, my experience justified the supposition; and assuming that for purposes of her own she had resolved on the horrible deed, it was quite conceivable that she took Cortazzi into her confidence, and that the Italian co-operated with her in bringing about the fatal result.

Probably the reader who has pursued my argument so far will already have sat in judgment on Mrs. Melville and Cornelia Cortazzi, and pronounced them guilty. But stop a minute, dear sir or madam, for

here is another item that tends to very greatly complicate matters, and most certainly it deepens the mystery. The doorway through which Hulton saw a woman disappear just before the dinner on the day of the crime communicated with a smoking-room. From the smoking-room one could gain a side passage, into which a flight of stairs descended from the upper part of the house, or he could pass into a conservatory, and thence get into a portion of the grounds. Now, about the time that Hulton saw the smoking-room door closed and a piece of a woman's skirt shut in, a youth named Charles Jessop, who was an assistant to the gardener, was weeding a flower-bed not far from the conservatory, when, hearing footsteps, he looked up from his work and saw a woman, who had evidently come out of the conservatory, cross the gravel path, hurry across the lawn, and disappear behind some bushes that screened her further movements from him. Charles Jessop was a dull-witted country hobbledehoy, and though the woman was a stranger to him, and he thought she was a beggar or loafer of some kind, he did not trouble himself to rise to his feet and use some endeavours to ascertain who she was, and what she had been doing in the conservatory. He said that she had a handkerchief tied over her head, and as far as he could see she was very dark complexioned, had black hair, and was shabbily dressed. Now, this incident was rendered the more mysterious by the circumstance that at that time Cornelia Cortazzi was in the nursery with little Jessie. The child, having been playing with a knife, had cut her finger, and the nurse was binding it up. This I proved conclusively. Mrs. Melville was in her bedroom with Mrs. Wortleberry. The two ladies had been there for at least an hour, and Mrs.

Melville was still in the midst of her toilet, and did not go downstairs with her friend until at least ten minutes after the dinner-bell rang. The gentlemen then were already seated at the table. We have thus a third and mysterious personage introduced on the scene—a woman with black hair, dark complexion, and shabbily dressed.

Who was she?

I shall suggest an answer to that question a little further on.

Was it she whom Hulton saw disappearing from the dining-room?

That I will also endeavour to give a logical answer to, but in the meantime let us endeavour to find a motive for the crime. Mrs. Melville had been in the habit of sometimes going to Edinburgh during her husband's absence. Why did she go? She herself stated that she stayed with her half-cousin, a Mrs. Campbell, who was the wife of a lawyer. That statement I found to be correct, but Mrs. Campbell was given to drink, and Mrs. Campbell's career had been somewhat shady. Colonel Melville did not like either of them, and had forbidden his wife to go near them. That on the face of it was a fairly good reason why she kept her visits secret from the Colonel. But she had another reason, I felt sure of, and it was that she made her kinswoman's house a rendezvous for meeting an admirer. Of course Mrs. Campbell denied it strenuously, but I did not place any reliance on what she said. This statement is made with a due regard for its seriousness. Then again it had come out that now and again during the Colonel's absence a military-looking gentleman had come to Shot Castle, and on those occasions Mrs. Melville did not go to Edinburgh.

She very resolutely refused to give the slightest information about this gentleman. Why should that have been so? If everything was fair and above board, there was no necessity for concealment, especially in a case of this kind where a foul double murder had been committed.

It was my duty, of course, to get evidence of a kind that would justify a trial, if not a conviction; but the delicacy and difficulty of my position will, I am sure, be appreciated. For a coroner's jury, after a patient and exhaustive inquiry, having failed to obtain evidence against any particular person such as would have justified arrest, I was placed at a great disadvantage in pursuing my inquiries, and had to work in a secret and silent manner. There could be no doubt, so far as the information I gathered went, and that information seemed reliable enough, that Mrs. Melville was not particularly attached to her stepson, though the consensus of opinion was that he was a most amiable and lovable young man. Now, what were the causes that led to her disliking him? I determined these for myself, of course, theoretically. He was greatly attached to his father, consequently not likely to have remained silent had he seen anything on the part of his stepmother that would have seemed to him like disloyalty or faithlessness to his father. Let us suppose, therefore, that he had seen something that he disapproved of, and had taken her to task, that would establish a *raison d'être* for the feeling she displayed towards him. We will go a step further, and assume that he had spoken to his father on the subject, and here at once we have an explanation of the scene in the drawing-room, when Hulton discovered Cortazzi concealed behind the screen.

According to Hulton, the Colonel and his wife had

been quarrelling. He was obviously jealous of her, and these words were heard by the butler—

"Maude, this must end; I cannot endure it; it is embittering and poisoning my whole life."

What did these words point to? To my mind they were pregnant with deep significance. The Colonel was jealous. His jealousy was the result of certain communications made to him by his son, and it had led to an unhappy difference between the Colonel and his wife; and in this connection let us not overlook the words which Mrs. Melville gave utterance to in Hulton's presence after the Colonel had left the room. With a passionate outburst of feeling she exclaimed—

"Oh, what a blind, stupid fool I have been!"

In what way had she been a blind, stupid fool? The only answer that readily comes to this query is that she, being a young, handsome woman, had married a man double her age, and, like thousands before her, bitterly regretted it when too late. On the day I am alluding to she had consented to Cornelia Cortazzi concealing herself behind the screen, so that the Italian might be a witness of what passed between them. This incontestably proved collusion between the two women. On the other hand, what could have been the ulterior motive of Mrs. Melville in wishing to have a witness? The Colonel was not a man likely to so far forget himself as to resort to personal violence against a woman, and that woman his wife. It was agreed on all sides that he was a gentleman in the truest sense of the word, and not likely to resort to methods of enforcing his opinions such as are generally associated with the brutal and the ignorant. A gentleman with any sense of chivalry would have to be provoked in a very extraordinary manner if he so far lost command of

himself as to strike a woman. I ascertained that Mrs. Melville had formerly been a Miss M'Ainsh. She was the only daughter of an Edinburgh draper who had made money and retired to London with his wife and family. He subsequently lost nearly the whole of his money, however, owing to the failure of a bank. Previous to this Miss M'Ainsh had displayed a great love of gaiety. She thought of little else but theatres, balls, parties, picnics, and the like, and was said to have been a very great flirt. It was generally supposed that her marriage with the Colonel was a marriage of convenience, not of love so far as she was concerned. He had means, and she was poor; moreover, he was a man who moved in excellent society, and she was ambitious of being well connected. She met him after her father's misfortune, and she had not known him very long before she consented to become his wife. They lived in London for a time, having a house in Kensington. But he was fond of the country; he liked shooting, fishing, and kindred sports, hence the reason that he took Shot Castle. His wife expressed a strong objection to going to live there. She said one might as well bury one's self as to go and reside in a place so far removed from everything and everybody. She wished her husband to retain the house in London as well, but this he declined to do, saying that he could not afford it, and so they removed to the Border country, though Mrs. Melville never took kindly to it. She complained greatly of the want of society, and she said it was a "deadly dull place."

The opinion I formed of Mrs. Melville was that she was an exceedingly superficial woman, with no resource within herself. She liked excitement and frivolity, and a quiet country existence had no charm for her.

If we now consider all these things—the lady's antecedents, her temperament, her small-mindedness, and the sense of disappointment under which she laboured—we can readily understand that the Colonel's married life was not without its dark and thorny side. She was, as I have said, an exceedingly pretty woman physically. By this I wish to convey that she lacked prettiness of mind. Her face was expressionless in a sense, her blue eyes cold and suggestive of hardness of heart. She gave me the impression of being a deceitful woman, with a great deal of cunning in her nature. She did not look one full in the face, and she prevaricated a great deal when she wished to avoid giving a straightforward answer to a question. She was not unconscious, of course, that suspicion had fallen upon her, and this made her peculiarly crafty and cautious.

My attempts to discover who the "military-looking" man was who had on two or three occasions come to the Castle in her husband's absence were not crowned with success. It was significant that twice at least when he came the Colonel's son was also away from home; and on another occasion the young fellow was confined to his room with illness. The stranger's visits were of brief duration, and only once did he take anything in the house. Then a very plain luncheon was served by Hulton in Mrs. Melville's boudoir. Hulton described him as "a showy man in the very prime of life." He always came to the house on foot, and left on foot, so that the servants had no means of knowing where he came from.

It was of the very highest importance in a case of this kind that one should endeavour to discover the source from whence the poison was obtained, and I had had that in my mind from the very commencement.

The reader perhaps knows, and, if he doesn't, he will pardon me for telling him, that antimony is the base of the tartar emetic of commerce. In its natural state it is of a bluish-white colour, and does not tarnish, as most metallic substances do. It can be melted very readily, but is not in any way volatile. What is known as the "prepared sulphuret" is blackish-grey, and can be dissolved with muriatic acid and heat. This sulphuret is very deadly to human beings and most animals. Its action is principally on the stomach and intestines, which it gradually corrodes, and produces the most agonizing suffering. For this reason it is one of the most dreadful and cruel poisons a human being can suffer from. Yet, strangely enough, it can be administered to a horse with great advantage, as it puts the animal in what is termed "condition," and makes his coat soft and glossy. This peculiarity has long been known, and grooms have been in the habit of using it. On account of its danger, however, in careless hands, and the facilities it offers to any one evil-minded enough to wish to destroy a fellow-being's life, horse-owners generally set their face against having it in their stables.

I found, however, that antimony had at one time been used in the stable at Shot Castle. The Colonel had a favourite horse which suffered very much from boils, and a veterinary surgeon ordered antimony to be given; but that was a long time before the death of the Colonel and his son, and the most careful search of the stable failed to bring to light any trace of antimony, and the coachman was of opinion that every bit of it had been used. Of course, I did not shut my eyes to the probability that some had been taken away during the time it was being medicinally used in the stable. Assuming that to have been the case, did it

not suggest that the crime had long been planned, though it was rather singular that it should have been carried out on the day when there was a visitor in the house? Why was that particular day chosen?

And now I must revert to the mysterious person who was seen by the youth, Charles Jessop, coming from the conservatory on the day of the murder. That woman was an utter stranger, because the youth did not recognize her; and nobody in the house, so far as I could ascertain, was aware of such a person having been there for any legitimate purpose. What had she been doing in the conservatory? Had she not been farther than the conservatory and into the dining-room? If so, was it her hand that placed the deadly drug in the port-wine decanter? and was she a mere tool or a principal? A tool most likely, because everything pointed to the conclusion that she could not have gone into the pantry after the dinner and have emptied the remaining wine out of the decanter. Whoever did that was well acquainted with the house, and must have watched the butler, because when he was removing the things from the dinner-table, he was constantly in and out of the pantry. It was during one of his brief intervals of absence that the wine was thrown out, and whoever threw it out must have been watching for the opportunity. The strange woman could hardly have been in the house and have got away without being noticed. Jessop's description of her was that she had the outward semblance of a vagrant.

For some time a family of gipsies had been encamped about seven miles from Shot Castle in a little dell by the side of a stream. They were there on the day of the murder. Amongst their number were three or

four women answering to the description given by Jessop. Was it one of those women who came from the conservatory ? I strongly suspected it, but they all declared that they were not absent from their camp that day at all. I did not attach much importance to that assertion. They were not the sort of people who had any very high regard for truth, but the difficulties in the way of disproving their statement were insurmountable. I kept a secret watch on their camp for weeks. I tried to find out if any of their number had received money of late, but all to no purpose. If they had any guilty knowledge, they knew how to conceal it.

It is surely no confession of weakness to say that I was baffled. All the resources of my art I had brought to bear without avail. Such ingenuity as I possessed I had exercised to its uttermost limits. I resorted to every means known to my calling, and to means peculiar to myself, and yet I had failed to drag the hidden mystery to light and reveal the dark and dreadful secret to the world. The law wanted legal evidence, and no legal evidence was forthcoming. Theory did not satisfy blind Justice, who said, " Let me have something that is unmistakable evidence of the guilt of So-and-so, and then I will smite ; but I cannot strike at random and in the dark, for it involves a question of human life, and human life must not be exacted as a penalty except on the clearest of evidence."

I recognized the solemnity of this dictum, but human cunning had for once thwarted me. It was not that in this particular crime any extraordinary amount of cleverness had been displayed. On the contrary, it was a clumsy murder, but it had succeeded owing to a concatenation of circumstances, which favoured the criminal in a very special manner and cheated Justice of her due.

To most people it will seem strange that such a murder should have been committed in such a place at such an hour and under such conditions without some flaw being detected in the precautions taken by the murderer by which the crime could have been brought home. But so it was. Luck was on the side of the evil-doer, and that luck enabled the majesty of the law to be outraged with impunity.

It may be suggested that the person who could most easily have poisoned the wine with the very minimum of risk was John Hulton, the butler. But here, let me say, I watched Hulton closely, though not the shadow of a sign could I detect that would have warranted suspicion of him. In his case there was an utter absence of all motive. He had absolutely nothing to gain, so far as one could tell. He was known to have been a great favourite with his master, and he himself was strongly attached to Walter Melville. No, John Hulton was as innocent as a new-born baby. Possibly it was considered by the criminal that suspicion might fall and rest upon the butler, and, had he been a different man to what he was, it would have done so. But his life had been singularly free from blemish. He was a steady, upright, God-fearing man, who wore his heart upon his sleeve.

And so it comes to pass that the Shot Castle mystery remains a mystery still. Years have waxed and waned since the fatal day when poor Colonel Melville and his crippled son were so cruelly done to death. They sleep in the little village churchyard, and the grass has waved for many a season above their grave, but their murderer has escaped. Within a very short time of the crime the Castle was shut up, and once more it was given over to silence and decay. Mrs. Melville was left

very well off indeed by her husband, for the whole of his fortune was to go to her in the event of his son not outliving him. She went to reside in Edinburgh, and Cornelia Cortazzi returned to her native country, Italy, and was of necessity soon lost sight of. But, all unknown to herself, Mrs. Melville was watched for a long time, though nothing could be brought against her. If the strange man whom she was supposed to receive when she went to Edinburgh, and who was known to have visited her at Shot Castle, had made her any promise, he did not, so far as outsiders could tell, fulfil that promise. For no man answering his description was ever seen to go near her when she became a widow. Had he got frightened and deserted her? That certainly seems a rational theory, and probably it was true. But this is just one of those sort of tantalizing cases which make one feel that it would be worth any amount of money to be able to drag the secret to light. But the secret remains a secret, and is likely to do so until the grave shall give up its dead, and all hearts shall be laid bare.

It is a strange commentary upon this story of a dark deed, that exactly fourteen months after her husband's death, Mrs. Melville married a draper's assistant. He was at least ten years younger than she was, and was a narrow-chested, white-faced, insignificant-looking specimen of a man, whose expression was rather that of an idiot than of an intelligent being. What she could have seen in him to admire it is impossible to say. Perhaps she took him in very desperation, driven to it by the bitterness of a cankering disappointment. Perhaps she felt that she could not live without a companion of some sort, and better to have a fool than no one at all. After her marriage she removed from

Edinburgh and took up her residence in the island of Jersey, where, as I subsequently, learned, her husband acquired a taste for strong drink and card-playing, and he and his wife led a cat-and-dog life. The sudden jump from a draper's counter to the position of the husband of a wealthy woman was evidently too much for his addled brain, and success ruined him.

THE STRANGE STORY OF AN OLD MAN'S LOVE.

One morning a gentleman called upon me and sent in his card, which bore the inscription :—

HENRI BELMONT,
The Tower,
Cromwell Road,
Kensington.

He said his business was private and urgent, and that he would be obliged if I would see him at once. I could not do that, however, as I was engaged, and it was half-an-hour before I could grant him an interview.

He was a handsome, even fascinating man, with a suave manner, a smiling face, clear blue eyes, a light beard and moustache, and light curly hair that fell about a white and well-shaped forehead. His physique was faultless, his presence commanding, and he was exceedingly pleasant, affable, and condescending. He was in possession of a perfect set of teeth, and it seemed as if his moustache had been specially trimmed and trained so as not to hide them. His face bore the ruddy glow of health, and was one of those laughing faces which do one good to look at. In age he was not more than thirty-two, and might even have passed for a younger man. He did not strike me as being either a thinker, or a person of any striking powers of intellect. I classed him at once as amongst the light comedy gentlemen of the great human family. A fellow who

lived well, dressed well, was a *bon vivant*, somewhat of a *gourmet*, finnicking, faddy, vain, conceited, always on good terms with himself, and who was utterly incapable of taking a serious view of anything. You could imagine him saying to the friend who had lent him a five-pound note and was requesting its return—

"All right, dear old chap, don't let it worry you. I will return it to you some day. In the meantime just lend me another fiver, and come and sup with me, and I will stand a bottle of fiz."

He spoke with just a suspicion of a foreign accent, and gesticulated and shrugged his shoulders in the most approved French or Italian fashion. The foregoing was the estimate I formed of the man before he had been with me five minutes, and to what extent I was correct, will presently be seen. Let me add that I came to the conclusion that, while I might enjoy his acquaintanceship and like him as a companion, I should not care to trust him as a friend. This involves a very nice distinction, which the reader who understands friendship in its exalted sense will appreciate.

"I have ventured to call upon you, Mr. Donovan," he began, "on a very delicate and somewhat peculiar mission."

"Are you a native of this country, sir?" I asked.

"Yes and no. My mother was a French lady, my father an Englishman. I was born at Lyons, and remained in France until I was fourteen. Then I came to this country, where I have been ever since."

"Thank you," I said. "And now, sir, what can I have the pleasure of doing for you?"

"May I be permitted to state my own case in my own way?" he asked with an exceedingly pleasant smile, and displaying his white even teeth as he spoke.

He was very conscious of those teeth. That fact could not be mistaken by the most casual observer.

"Oh, certainly," I replied.

"And if my olfactory nerves deceive me not," he continued still smiling, "there is a reek of excellent tobacco in the place. I take it as a sign that you are fond of the weed." I nodded an assent. "Then may I?" he asked, prolonging the smile and producing from his pocket a very handsome silver cigarette case.

"I haven't the slightest objection," I remarked, whereupon he opened the case, offered it to me, and I helped myself to a cigarette. He did the same, restored the case to his pocket, took a vesta from a silver matchbox which he carried in his waistcoat pocket, struck a light, and when we were both in full blast he proceeded in his pleasant, affable, smiling way.

"Well, now, as I observed, my mission is a delicate and peculiar one—"

"But not serious," I suggested with a faint smile myself, for he and seriousness seemed so utterly irreconcilable.

"Oh, indeed, it is," he exclaimed, making a desperate effort to suppress the smile that wouldn't be suppressed, for smiling appeared to be his chronic condition.

"But it is comedy rather than tragedy," I remarked.

"That is true, though it is comedy of a serious kind."

"Pardon my interruption, and proceed. I will not interrupt again," I answered.

"Thanks. Well, it's this way. I have a friend, a very, very dear friend indeed. We have known each other for a great many years. My friend bears the somewhat unromantic name of Smith—James Smith—but he is

none the worse for that," and Mr. Henri Belmont laughed at his own little joke. "Mr. Smith is a wealthy man, and not in his first youth. It is no betrayal of secrets for me to tell you that he is about sixty. Now a man at sixty is not a *poulet*, is he? eh?" here Mr. Belmont laughed again. It took very little indeed to make him laugh. He certainly did seem to enjoy what he considered his own witticisms. However, it could not be said that he was in any way objectionable on that account. There is so much weeping in the world that it is good to find a man who is on the side of laughter. "Up to a year ago my dear friend Smith had lived a bachelor's life. He was a gay dog, and gave most excellent little dinners in his charming bungalow at Richmond. But quite suddenly he announced to his friends that he was on the verge of being married. We considered this a huge joke, and roared accordingly, for it was so ludicrous to think of Smith, the confirmed bachelor, forswearing at his age the bliss and joys of single life, to take upon himself the cares of the matrimonial state. But he assured us as solemnly as if he was preaching his own funeral sermon that it was true. Then we wept, for the snug little parties and the delights of Liberty Hall, as we called Smith's place, would be known no more. We thought of temporarily confining Smith in a private asylum until the attack of the disease from which he was suffering had passed, for we considered it was a form of dementia that had suddenly seized him, and as we were all very fond of Smith, we were necessarily deeply concerned. We had always looked upon Smith as a confirmed misogamist; indeed, he had so represented himself, and as far as we were concerned we preferred Smith the misogamist to Smith the benedict. But in this country the liberty of the subject is so highly

valued by free-born Britons that we might have got into trouble, so we groaned and endured, solacing ourselves as best we could; but sighing, nevertheless, for the joys we should know no more.

"Now, not the least strange part of the business was this. Smith wouldn't give us a scrap of information as to who the lady was, where she was coming from, what family she represented, or anything at all about her. He simply said, in answer to our thousand queries, 'Gentlemen, she is ravishing, she is divine, she is the personification of all that is good, true, and virtuous in woman.' That was all very well, but naturally we were desirous of knowing who the paragon was. It was utterly useless, however, for he mocked us with the set phrase 'wait and see.' That is all we could get out of him. A week later he disappeared. Not a soul of us knew where he had gone to. His charming old fossil of a housekeeper said he had gone to be married. That was all *she* knew, and she added the dreadful information that he would be absent six weeks."

As my visitor seemed to me to be a little prolix and tedious I could not help saying—

"I must break my promise not to interrupt by asking if this story has any direct bearing on the business that has brought you here?"

"Oh, indeed it has, I assure you; but I like to tell my stories in my own way. There is a large element of the comic in the story I am now telling and I can't help laughing at it even now, but for poor Smith it is sad and serious enough," he answered.

"Go on, then, I am all patience."

"At the end of six weeks to a day," he continued, "dear old Smith returned, bringing with him his radiant bride. And she was radiant, I tell you. I

don't think, really, that I ever saw a prettier girl in my life. I use the word girl, and take note, sir, that I mean a girl. She was scarcely more than nineteen, and remember, as I have said, that dear old Smith was frosty with the winters of over sixty years. It was really too ridiculous, too funny, this wedding of May and December, but, by Jove, it was all true enough. Smith had actually married the girl, and when we ventured to chaff him or crack a joke at his expense, by thunder, he waxed furious. Being his very old friend, and a very privileged one, I ventured to remark in a thoughtless sort of way, 'Why, Smith, how long do you expect she will remain with you?' He boiled up with wrath, and answered me that she would remain with him until he was dead, and be true to his memory ever after. Well, I may tell you this, Mr. Donovan, that little woman was the most charming creature that ever looked up to God's stars, but I soon saw very plainly her married life was not a happy one. Don't mistake me, now. If ever there was a doting old fool—pardon the expression—it was Smith. He surrounded his wife with every luxury that wealth could buy. Her lightest fancy, her most absurd whim was gratified. The ground she walked upon was to him precious. The slippers she wore were sacred relics that he would have preserved in a glass case, only had he done that he might have gone on buying her slippers until he became bankrupt, for, beautiful and ethereal as she was, slippers were a necessity. However, in spite of his devotion and the luxury with which he surrounded her she was not happy—she was not happy because she did not love him."

"How do you know that?" I asked quickly.

"I know it because she told me."

"You were her confidant, then?"

"No; not exactly," he answered, still smiling, but averting his gaze from me as though he was conscious of not speaking the truth.

"But still if she told you that," I observed, "she must have taken you very much into her confidence."

"Well, you see, she had been informed that I was her husband's oldest and most cherished friend."

"But, knowing that, how was it she came to tell you that she did not love that husband? You will pardon these questions, but it is a habit I have of asking for light to be thrown on points that seem to me to require lighting up."

"Oh, of course I'll pardon you," he replied with an air of lofty condescension; "but the fact is, in dealing with a man like you one has to be so mighty particular about his expressions. I ought really to have said that I wormed the little secret out of her. Indeed, to be strictly accurate, she did not tell me, but allowed me to infer, and when I asked if my inference was right she was silent."

"Ah, just so," I ejaculated with some irony, which, however, he did not seem to notice, for he went on—

"Now a woman's conversation may mean a good deal, but her silence means infinitely more. When a woman is silent, depend upon it she is thinking, and when she thinks, there is mischief brewing; a woman can't be silent without thinking of mischief."

"You are a little severe—I had almost said ungallant."

"No, I am not ungallant; but you, as a man, know that I speak the truth. Let me qualify my statement, however, by adding that while a woman always talks words she sometimes *thinks* wisdom." I did not admit

his insinuation that I was with him when he asserted that a woman when she is silent is nearly always thinking of mischief. "Now comes the sequel," he continued.

"I guess it," I remarked.

"Well, what is it?"

"She has left her aged husband."

"By George! you are as good as a witch. That is so. Two months ago she mysteriously disappeared, taking with her every portable valuable she had, and a good many belonging to her husband, together with a very considerable sum in hard cash."

"And has her devoted husband cursed her?" I asked caustically.

"By heaven, no! but he has been almost out of his mind and prostrated on a bed of sickness. I couldn't have conceived it possible dear old Smith would have taken the matter to heart so."

"Do you come to me now on his behalf?"

"I do most certainly."

"And you wish me to trace the lady?"

"Yes. I myself have been trying to do it ever since she went away. You see I pride myself on being a sort of amateur detective, indeed, I think I am as cute as most of the fellows who make a living out of the business."

"Cuter, I should imagine," I said slily, and feeling a little amused at his conceit.

"I really think I am," he answered, the smile breaking out all over his face again.

"And yet if you were pitted against one of those fellows who make a living by the business, you would probably find your amateur knowledge of the craft would serve you but very little."

"I'm not so sure of that," he answered, trying to

frown, though the trial was a failure. "I should be open to back myself against a good many of them; but hear me out. When Smith found that his beautiful young girl wife had gone he sent for me immediately and poured his woes into my sympathetic ear. And you may imagine I was sympathetic. His woes were so very real, his distress pitiable. He assured me he should go mad, and he prayed me to aid him in every possible way to recover his pretty but naughty little wife. I tried all I could think of to persuade him that it was better to let her go. That a woman who could behave so heartlessly and cruelly to him was really not worth bothering about, and it was degrading to his manhood to let the matter trouble him as it was doing; but, Lord bless you, Mr. Donovan, I might just as well have talked to a wooden stump. Smith was clean gone. I never did see a man cut up so much about a faithless spouse. I was truly sorry for him, and having exhausted all my powers of persuasion to no purpose, I pledged myself to do whatever I could to bring back his fickle lady-love, whereupon he paid me the compliment of saying—'Belmont, you are as good a detective as ever lived, and I am sure you will succeed.'"

Mr. Belmont tried to get up a little blush of modesty as he thus sounded his own trumpet, but he was no more successful than he was when he tried to frown. I could not resist a bit of irony, so I said to him—

"I may infer then from your visit to me that your dear friend Smith evidently overrated your ability?"

"In that particular respect, yes. We cannot be all Dick Donovans, you know," he retorted.

"True. If you were there would probably be fewer rogues and rascals in the world."

"Pray, don't let us bandy words," he said. "As I told you at first, this is a serious business." He smiled again, and I smiled, for it seemed so utterly ridiculous to associate seriousness with this frivolous and light-hearted gentleman. "When Smith urged me to use my endeavours to bring back his erring wife I asked him very solemnly, and, though you may not think it, I can be solemn when I like—well, I asked him solemnly if he really wished me to understand that he was prepared to fold his pretty but giddy young wife to his bosom once more, providing she could be found and induced to return to him again. And on that he clasped his hands together in an agony of despair and exclaimed—'Belmont, I tell you, before God, that I love this woman so devotedly that nothing she could possibly do could change that love. If I thought it would gratify her, I would lie down and let her tramp upon me.' I could not help feeling some contempt for poor old Smith for this pitiable weakness, but I shrugged my shoulders, promised him to leave no stone unturned to recover the lost young woman, and then I set off on my quest."

"And have not succeeded?"

"No."

"Now, what do you want me to do, Mr. Belmont?"

"Well, you see, Smith has taken the matter so deeply to heart that his very life is threatened, and he has insisted on my coming to you and engaging your services. I did not wish to do so, but he insisted, so here I am."

"It is a sad story, sir," I remarked, "in spite of the levity you have displayed."

"My levity is unintentional," he replied, "but it does seem so absurd for an old man like Smith to

allow himself to be crushed because his wife has proved false."

"From your point of view, Mr. Belmont, it may seem absurd, but it is obvious that your friend is a man of intense feeling and great sincerity."

"Of course there is no doubt about that," exclaimed my visitor. "I do not doubt for an instant that he is sincere enough, poor fellow. But, now, what I want you to do is to set to work without delay. Pardon me for saying that I do not think you will succeed——"

"Because you have failed," I put in caustically.

"Yes, if you like to have it that way," he answered.

What did you say your friend's address is?" I asked.

"The Gables, Richmond."

"Very well, I will call upon him to-morrow morning."

"Oh, there is no necessity to do that," cried Belmont, with, as it seemed to me, a touch of anxiety in his manner and tone. "Here is a photograph of the lady, and I presume that is all you require." As he spoke he produced from his pocket a cabinet-sized photo of as pretty a young woman as ever sat before a camera. He noticed that I was struck by it, and added—

"She is a pretty girl, isn't she?"

"She is more than pretty, she is beautiful," I answered.

"Well, now can you wonder that so charming a young creature as that soon tired of her old greybeard lover?"

"I do wonder," I remarked. "It is inexpressibly sad. Having married him she should have remained true to him; it is a terrible, a hideously wicked thing to trifle with the holiest sentiments of the human heart."

"But she only married him for his money."

"Then that proves that her sweet, I had almost said angelic, face, is a mask for a devilish nature."

"Ah, just so," replied Mr. Belmont, with something like a long drawn sigh, though the smile was still on his lips, but all women are devilish, more or less, you know. The angel part of them is all on the surface, the devil reigns supreme internally."

"You speak from experience, probably?"

"I do."

"Then I am sorry that your experience should be so different to other people's."

"Come now, Mr. Donovan, you must admit that I speak the truth."

"I will not admit anything of the kind, sir," I anwered with severity. "I have too high an appreciation of the female nature to endorse any such sweeping condemnation as you utter. Women are the light, the truth, the goodness of the world. But for them men would be ten thousand times worse than they are."

He shrugged his shoulders and made another attempt to look serious, saying—

"Well, we must agree to differ. Do what you can in the business. It will be some satisfaction to Smith, at any rate, to know that you have taken the case up."

"And it will be satisfaction to me," I added, "if I can succeed in exposing the black-hearted rascal who has tempted this poor woman from her allegiance to the man she vowed to honour and respect."

"Well, after all it is only a bit of human nature," he remarked.

"Yes, but a bit of very bad human nature, which for the credit and honour of right thinking men should be severely dealt with."

"I won't dispute you," he said lightly, "but if Smith would take my advice he will let her go. A soiled dove is not worth reclaiming."

"That is your opinion. But now tell me, Mr. Belmont, have you really made serious efforts to trace the lady?"

"Oh, indeed I have."

"And you have quite failed to get a clue?"

"No, not altogether failed. I ascertained that a lady answering the description of the fickle Mrs. Smith stayed at the Golden Cross Hotel with a gentleman who was supposed to be a foreigner, and that they departed thence for the Continent."

"What part of the Continent?"

"I don't know. There my knowledge ends."

"By what process did you succeed in tracing the fugitives to the Golden Cross Hotel?"

"By the same process that you yourself use presumably when you are trying to run anybody down."

"That is scarcely an answer, sir."

"That is the only answer I can give you."

"Very well. It is not for me to seek to ascertain your own peculiar methods. Possibly mine may be more successful."

"Possibly," he echoed, with his blandest smile, which somehow suggested a sneer, and then he added, "and possibly not."

Having promised Mr. Belmont that I would do what I could, he took his departure. I was by no means favourably impressed with him; it is likely enough this feeling was due to his frivolous nature, which seemed disposed to make light of another man's sorrow. Then I turned to the photograph he had left with me, and studied it. I have already said that it represented a

strikingly handsome girl. But there was nothing whatever in the face that was suggestive of a hard-hearted nature. The mouth possibly was weak, though, with that exception, there wasn't a single fault to find with it, and what struck me was that, if she had proved false, it was because some treacherous and fascinating power had been brought to bear, and she had yielded to it, inasmuch as she could not possibly resist it, I therefore mentally resolved to save her, if it were at all possible, from the cruel fowler's snare, and to snatch her from it as a brand from the burning.

Naturally my first step was to see Mr. Smith. To have attempted to have gone into the case without him would have been like trying to produce the play of Hamlet without Hamlet. I found him absolutely prostrated on a bed of sickness. When I called it chanced that his medical adviser was with him, and as soon as this gentleman heard who I was he requested to see me privately, and taking me into the dining-room said—

"I am glad you have taken up this matter, Mr. Donovan, for it is a serious business, very serious—that is, I mean it is serious for my patient."

"I understand he has taken it very much to heart," I remarked.

"Oh dear, yes, and I really do not wonder at it. He is one of the most sensitive and most gentle of men I have ever known, and, of course, a person at his time of life hasn't the recuperative power that a younger one would have. I happen to know that he was wrapped up in his wife. He believed her perfect, and the sudden discovery of her deception was a shock against which he could not stand. I am deeply concerned about him."

"Is his life in danger, may I ask?"

"Well—" answered the doctor cautiously, "I shouldn't like to say there is immediate danger, but you see he is brooding over his loss, and that necessarily retards his recovery. The most serious feature in his case from a medical point of view is the extreme weakness. We cannot but regard that with some concern in a man of his years. I hope that you may be able to obtain news of his faithless wife. I am sure he would forgive her anything."

"You know the lady, I presume, doctor?"

"Oh, yes. I met her several times here."

"Will you tell me how she impressed you?"

"You mean in a general way?"

"Yes."

"Well—she struck me as being very charming in many respects, but I have always thought she lacked backbone. What I mean is, she gave me the idea that she was changeable, not quite sure of her own mind, and very easily persuaded one way or the other. These things, no doubt, are the sins of youth, but they are very apt to lead a young woman of her disposition into difficulties. Her nature too is impressionable; she has displayed some slight tendency to hysteria, and a woman with that tendency is very apt to be led away by false views and ideas. To sum up, I should be disposed to think that in the hands of a designing and artful person, Mrs. Smith would be as potter's clay. In a word she is weak-minded. She wouldn't incline to evil from any naturally depraved instincts, but she might be persuaded into evil simply because she lacks the power of discernment, which is essential, in order that one may guard against the vicious. Viciousness may be clothed in such a garb of seeming virtue that

the innocent and unsuspecting are very apt to be deceived by it."

In these few and well-chosen words the doctor gave me a very good insight into the lady's character, and the inference was inevitable that she was extremely likely to be lured by the shadow, and so miss the substance. In short, she had in the present instance fallen a victim to villainy.

"I understand, doctor," I remarked, "that Mr. Henri Belmont has made some efforts to trace the lady?"

The doctor smiled, as he answered—

"Oh, yes; and possibly with sufficiently good intentions, but I may mention to you, *sub rosa*, that I consider Mr. Belmont such a very frivolous gentleman that it is difficult to imagine him doing anything seriously. He really seems to consider that life is made up of a huge joke. Apparently he has never experienced a pang or known a care himself, and so he finds a difficulty in understanding suffering in others. He has talked to me about this unhappy affair, and I have clearly gathered from his conversation that he regards Mr. Smith as a very weak, and very maudlin person for allowing his wife's conduct to affect him so much. However, we are not all built alike, and while such men as Belmont, no doubt, fulfil a useful purpose in the world, it is good for humanity that some of us should be able think deeply and feel deeply."

"Mr. Smith and Mr. Belmont are very warm friends, I believe, are they not?" I asked.

"Yes, I think they are. At any rate Belmont spent a great deal of time here during Smith's bachelor days."

"But possibly the fleshpots were unusually attractive,"

I suggested, with a certain delicacy of intonation as I wished the doctor to understand that I was imputing nothing, merely suggesting. But he answered quickly and bluntly—

"Oh, well, as for the matter of that, I don't think one need beat about the bush. Belmont belongs to the butterfly order of men. Sunshine and flowers are life to him, and no doubt he found Mr. Smith's wine, cigars, and dinners excellent, and he has enjoyed them accordingly. Smith has been renowned for his hospitality."

"Then I gather, sir," I remarked, "that you consider Belmont is a little given to estimating a man's worth by the quality of fare he provides for his guests?"

"Really. Mr. Donovan," exclaimed the doctor, with a little jerky laugh, as though he wasn't at his ease, "you are pushing the probe pretty far home, eh?"

"What am I to understand by that remark, doctor?"

"Well, you are trying to draw me out as regards Belmont."

"I simply want to know what *your* opinion of him is."

"You have met him?" asked the doctor, quickly.

"Oh, yes."

"Then may I inquire what opinion you hold?"

"I have formed a very decided opinion," I replied, "and want to find out if yours coincides with mine in any way."

The doctor, who was possessed of a very keen pair of dark eyes, turned them upon me with an inquiring and somewhat alarmed expression in them.

"Surely," he exclaimed, "you don't suspect that Mr. Belmont is a treacherous friend, do you?"

"Has any thing I have said led you to infer that?" He looked puzzled.

"Well, really, I—I scarcely know what to think," he stammered, and giving every indication by his face that I had awakened some new thought in his mind which caused him concern. "The fact is, you gentlemen who make it a business to solve knotty problems that defy ordinary people, have generally so much point in your questions, and yet they are put so skilfully that simple folk are taken off their guard. It is like giving a child a nauseous powder disguised in jam. The little one swallows it readily enough, but when too late discovers that it has been caught. Now, to be frank, I have never sufficiently studied Belmont's character—although I am naturally an observant man—to speak decisively where anything I might say was calculated to affect a man's reputation. I will, therefore, ask you to excuse my answering your question more explicitly. I confess, however, that you have given me food for reflection."

"I appreciate your sentiments," I remarked, "and we will not pursue the subject further. I presume you have no objection to my having an interview with your patient?"

"Oh, none whatever. I think on the contrary it may do him good, for you will give him hope."

"Hope of what?"

"Of recovering his lost wife."

"You think then he would receive her back if she were discovered and willing to come back?"

"I am sure of it, and it would be the best thing he could do. You see he is a man of very intense feeling, and for such a one to suffer a shock and disappointment of this kind is to imperil his life. I may add that he is the very soul of honour, and he suspects no one of evil. I have known him for many years, I

may say intimately, and, therefore, I speak by the card."

I bowed and thanked the doctor for his courtesy and frankness, and, as I left him, I felt that my interview with him had been profitable to me.

A white-aproned, becapped, and pretty serving-maid conducted me up to her master's chamber. It was an elegantly furnished room, with many little art trifles scattered about, which afforded evidence of a refined taste and cultured mind. The bed was covered with an exceedingly handsome crimson silk down rug, and propped up with pillows was Mr. Smith, his pale face thrown into striking relief by the crimson silk. It was a patrician face, in which a certain mental nobility was conspicuous. He stretched forth a feeble hand as I sat by the bedside, and shaking mine, he said in a thin voice, while a poor apology for a smile played about his well-shaped mouth—

"I am very glad you have come, Mr. Donovan, very glad. My good friend Belmont tells me that he has given you all the details of this wretched business. Therefore I shall be spared the pain of going into the painful subject. Mrs. Smith, poor child, is not to blame. I cannot, do not blame her. The fact is, Donovan, I—I ought not to have married her. She is a mere child, and I am an old man. A child ought not to mate with one old enough to be her grandfather. But in her dear presence I thought myself young again. You will think me very foolish, perhaps in my dotage, for talking like this——"

"Not at all, sir; not at all. Be assured that I very highly appreciate the feeling that you display," I answered.

"Thank you, thank you," he murmured, scarcely

able to control his voice, while his eyes unmistakably grew moist. "It does me good to hear you say so. My friend Belmont laughs at me, and I am afraid the doctor thinks I am a little foolish, but it is a mistake to think that an old man is incapable of sincere love."

"Had you known Mrs. Smith long before you married her?"

"Yes. Well, that is, I met her first about five years ago. I went on a little fishing expedition to the south of England, and was introduced to her by some friends with whom I stayed. She was the daughter of a widow lady, and had been leading a very quiet, humdrum sort of country life. I was subsequently a guest at her mother's house. I thought her charming when I first met her, but, on renewing acquaintance, she seemed to me the most beautiful young lady, mentally and physically, I had ever come in contact with. We frequently met after that, but my regard for her was of the most platonic description. I never dreamed of asking her to be my wife until a comparatively short time before I married her. But she had so grown into my heart that I thought the world could never be the same to me again without her, and, when she consented to accept me, I was really astonished myself. Poor girl, I fear she was soon greatly disillusioned."

"In what way?"

"Well, she thought she had thrown herself away on an old man."

"Did she ever tell you that?"

"Oh, dear, no."

"Why do you think it then?"

"Upon my word, I find it difficult to give you an answer."

"Did she seem dissatisfied in any way?"

"On the contrary, she expressed herself delighted with her house."

"And happy?"

"So far as I could judge, perfectly happy."

"You denied her nothing, I presume?"

"Nothing. Whatever she wanted she had."

"Did you ever show jealousy of her?"

"Good Heavens, no! I was the last man in the world to entertain a shade of evil thought."

"Did she go out much without you?"

"A good deal. She is youthful, I am old, and I was not so selfish nor so stupid as to wish to deny her youthful pleasures."

"And you saw nothing at any time in her conduct to lead you to suspect that she contemplated the step she has taken?"

"Nothing whatever. Her disappearance was like a bolt from the blue. Not a soul in my household, so far as I have gathered, suspected that she was going. She went out one afternoon, and did not return. She left a little note on my dressing-table, in which she said she was going for good, and that I was not to concern myself about her, as she was all unworthy of me."

"Now tell me this, Mr. Smith; do you regard that expression as the spontaneous outcome of her own feelings?"

This question troubled the poor gentleman very much, and he put his hand over his eyes, as if he wanted to screen from me the emotion he felt. After a pause he answered—"I really cannot think it was."

"You think she was prompted to it then?"

"I do."

"Have you tried in your own mind to form any idea who the prompter was?"

"I have."

"With what result?"

"None that I should be justified in stating."

"Have you suspected anyone amongst your acquaintances?"

"No one."

"That does credit to your heart, but your heart possibly wrongs your head."

"But how could I suspect any of my friends? Surely no one would be so base as to profess friendship for me and at the same time endeavour to corrupt my wife?"

Mr. Smith's simplicity was painful, and at the same time charming. Some men would have laughed at it; I didn't. I sorrowed to think that so unworldly a man, and one full of such faith in his fellows, should have been so cruelly and shamefully wronged.

"Well, sir," I answered feelingly, "it is certainly not pleasant to suppose that our friends—that is those whom we deem our friends—can be false; but, alas, we live in a wicked world; a world in which men are base, and women are fickle. Many a man under the guise of friendship has shattered and blasted for ever the happiness of some one who has implicitly trusted him. That poet of the heart, Robert Burns, immortalized a tremendous truth when he said:—

'Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn.'

It is very sad to think that we must go through life ever suspecting our neighbour. But all experience teaches us the wisdom of it. Envy and greed, jealousy and malice, and all uncharitableness, are the commonest attributes of human nature."

Mr. Smith was deeply affected.

"I fear you are right," he moaned; "but my life has been a very pleasant—very even one. Born to an independence, and inheriting from my parents a love of truth and a confiding nature, I have never sought to deceive, and never suspected that others would deceive me, and never having had occasion to see the rough side of existence, I have been very ignorant of many things that perhaps I should have been the better for knowing."

"I am not sure that you would, sir," I answered. "It is very delightful to live in a garden of perpetual roses, and to have no fear and no knowledge of the poison of asps which the roses may conceal. But to come to the point. I understand that you desire me to do all I possibly can to trace Mrs. Smith?"

"That is my desire."

"And supposing I am successful?"

"You will tell her that she holds my life by a word."

"By that you mean that if she refuses to return, to you the refusal may be serious?"

"The refusal, sir, would mean death to me," he exclaimed very earnestly.

"I don't think you ought to allow it to affect you so deeply as that."

"How can I help it? My life is bound up in this woman. If the gulf between us is so deep that she cannot come back, then my life has gone. It cannot be long even in the ordinary course of nature, but if you take away its very sap, the tree must wither before its time."

"Your similes are apt and expressive," I said; "believe me, I appreciate all you say. And I take it that should I succeed in finding Mrs. Smith, I am to

endeavour to persuade her to return to her rightful home?"

"Yes, by all means."

"Do you know how far your friend Belmont's efforts have gone in trying to trace Mrs. Smith?"

"Belmont is a good and noble-hearted fellow," Mr. Smith answered; "but I fear, though I don't like to say it, that he somewhat overrates his powers. The mere amateur is always more or less egotistical."

"Often very much more than less," I remarked.

"Possibly; but after all it is a very excusable and offenceless sort of egotism—"

"I don't agree with you there," I felt constrained to put in.

"Very well, we won't dispute about it. What I was going to say was that poor Belmont was a little impetuous. I wanted him in the first instance to enlist your services, and I can but regret that that was not done. But you see, Belmont and I are such old friends, and he was very desirous to avoid a scandal. It is a delicate matter, as you will admit, and we wished to keep it as secret as it could be kept. But still, knowing you as I do by reputation, I was sure the secret would be safe in your keeping."

"I venture to think it will. Belmont, however, thought otherwise."

"I should not like to say what his mind was on the subject. What I think is he had a little too much confidence in himself, and it is only now that he has been compelled to admit failure that he has consented, in compliance with my earnest entreaties, to call upon you."

"I am going to put one other question, Mr. Smith," I said. "It is an exceedingly delicate one; but its

appositeness will, I am sure, at once strike you. Was this marriage of yours—I mean as far as Mrs. Smith is concerned—a marriage of love or money?"

"I understand you, and I will answer you frankly. I believed, and do believe, and shall always believe, that the dear child loved me. She had been very well brought up, had a comfortable home, and though her mother was not rich she wanted for nothing. No, I don't, before Heaven, believe she married me for my money."

"How long has your wife been away now?"

"A little over two months."

"And how long is it since you married her?"

"A year."

I had now got from Mr. Smith all the information I desired, and in taking my leave I expressed a hope that I would soon be able to give him some definite information concerning the lady.

On leaving the Gables, my mind was pretty well made up as to the course I intended to pursue, and I may at once state I had come to the conclusion that the rascal who had blighted Mr. Smith's house and poisoned his happiness was none other than his trusted, so-called friend, Henri Belmont. I had read the man's character much deeper than he believed it possible I could do, and behind his smiling face, his plausible manner, and his seeming ingenuousness, I was sure I detected the hypocrite and deceiver. If I was correct in this surmise, his deception was certainly remarkable; but his very egotism had led him into a pitfall. He imagined himself so clever, and his plans so ingenious, that *he* was not likely to be suspected. But, strangely enough, his very answers to my questions led me to suspect him, and that suspicion was strengthened by my interview with Mr. Smith's medical man.

Belmont had told me that in playing the amateur detective he had traced the missing lady to the Golden Cross Hotel, where she had been seen with an apparent foreigner, and that from thence she had departed for the Continent. Of course, I pushed my inquiries at the Golden Cross, and I ascertained that on the date mentioned by Belmont a lady answering the description of Mrs. Smith stayed at the hotel and dined with a gentleman who was supposed to be a foreigner. In reply to my queries as to why he was supposed to be a foreigner, I was told that his dress suggested a foreigner, and he talked French to the lady. He had "lightish hair, but a very dark moustache and beard." This did not tally with Belmont's description. He had a light beard and moustache ; but then I was not unmindful what a transformation a little temporary dye will make in a person's appearance when judiciously applied. My next step was to ascertain from reliable sources if Belmont and Mrs. Smith spoke French, and I was informed that they spoke it like natives. Then, anxious to have another chat with Mr. Belmont, I called at his home—The Tower, Cromwell Road, Kensington. His people, it seemed, were very well off. His father was a retired solicitor, who had enjoyed a very large practice, and made a fortune; having had a good deal to do in conducting legal business in France for English clients. Henri was an only son, and had never done a stroke of work in his life. He had been over indulged and spoilt, and he had sought to make his existence a round of pleasure. When I called he was from home, and his people did not know where he had gone to. He was in the habit of going from home for days together, without saying where he was going to.

His absence now seemed to me significant, and as I

saw no chance of getting a clue there to his whereabouts, I thought it wouldn't be a bad thing to run down to Richmond again, and make an excuse for seeing Mr. Smith once more, when I might casually, and without alarming him, ask if he had any knowledge of his friend's whereabouts. I carried out this intention, and gave him to understand that my wish to see Belmont arose from the necessity I felt for questioning him on one or two points he had brought under my notice.

"Well," said Mr. Smith, "I hope I am not betraying confidence if I show you a little note I have just received from him. As it is not marked private you can read it."

He handed me an envelope as he spoke. It bore the Paris postmark. The envelope contained a half sheet of paper on which was written the following—

Hôtel de Grande Bretagne, Rue de Castiglione, Paris.

"My dear Smith,

"I have just popped over here as I have an inkling that the lost bird is in France somewhere; and I am very anxious, if possible, to beat Donovan on his own ground. These detective chaps you know have such a tremendous opinion of themselves, that it would be a great feather in the cap of an amateur if he succeeded where the professional fellow failed. Keep your heart up, old boy. Hope to have good news for you soon. Ta, ta. Shall be back in a few days.

"Yours always sincerely,

"Henri Belmont."

It seemed to me a cold-blooded, heartless letter, and somehow, I could not help feeling that the man who wrote it was a villain.

That night I crossed the Channel, and the next morning found me in Paris. I ascertained that Mr. Belmont had only stayed a day at the Hôtel de Grande Bretagne. He had often been there before and was well known. It was believed that he had then gone out to St. Germain, as the porter who took his bag and rug to the station heard him ask for a ticket for St. Germain, which, as most people know, is a charming spot on the Seine, a few miles from Paris. It is a rural and picturesque pleasure resort, and the extensive forest affords delightful excursions.

To St. Germain I next went. Most of the residents there make their living by keeping either hotels, restaurants, shops, or lodging-houses. In the summer it is full of visitors. Some come and flit away like butterflies. The morning trains from Paris bring down large numbers of excursionists and carry them back at night. But a relatively few families take up their quarters there for the summer months. It was summer now, and the hum of business was in the air. The usually dreamy, quiet place was astir with bustle and excitement. Busy waiters in black jackets and white aprons hurried to and fro, and laughing merry parties sat under awnings before the restaurants, or feasted beneath the shadow of the trees in the hotel gardens. Three days did I spend there but could get no trace of the man I sought. Then four and five days passed, but still no trace. If I didn't despair I was discomforted. But one morning I noted a lady hurrying along the main street; I was struck by her. I had seen her before, but not in the flesh. That is, I had looked upon the lady's likeness, for she was none other than the lost Mrs. Smith. I tracked her to a villa, quiet and retired, on the borders of the forest, and a mile

from the little town. There she had apartments, and there she had been residing for nearly three months. She was known as Madame Péleterie, and Monsieur Péleterie, her husband, who had just been to see her, had gone to England. By practising a little ruse I was suddenly shown into Madame's sitting-room, where she was seated deeply immersed in the perusal of a book. Her beauty had been in no way exaggerated. She was beautiful, but on her face, plainly as anything could be written, was the writing of the Angel of Sorrow. It was impossible to look into that lady's face and say she was happy. She started and rose as I entered.

"Pray keep your seat," I said. "I have business with you, painful business. I come from your dying husband. I know all, so do not attempt to prevaricate."

With a little low moan of pain, she clasped her white hands to her face, and sank back in the chair all of a heap, as the saying is, and she sighed out the word—

"Dying?"

"Yes, Madame; but he told me that you held his life in your hands. Do you wish that his death should lie at your door?"

She rocked herself to and fro. She wept bitterly, and when her voice came to her, she sobbed—

"Oh, my God, how wicked I have been; but I was sorely tempted, sorely tempted."

"And the man who tempted you, what is his name?" She made no answer, only sobbed, and sighed and rocked. "Shall I tell it to you?" I added. Still no answer. "The man's name is Henri Belmont," I continued.

She sprang up then. She wrung her hands; she clutched at her hair, and with an emphasis of expression that left no room to doubt her sincerity she hissed out—

"Oh, how I hate him," and she stamped her small foot on the polished floor to give further point to her words.

"I am glad to hear you say so," I answered. "A man with an evil heart is one to hate and be shunned, but he who is goodness and truth should be loved. Your husband's life is in your gift. Restore him to the world, to happiness, to the joy of once again possessing you."

She sank down on the floor in an agony of grief, and clasped her hands behind her neck, while her tear-wet face was bowed to her knees. In this position she was a sad picture of beauty, stricken with remorse and crushed with grief.

"It is impossible; impossible," she groaned. "I dare not look at him again. He would spurn me, cast me off, and curse me. Oh, I could not bear it; I could not bear it."

"Ah, how little you know of your noble and devoted husband," I replied. "Solemnly do I promise you that he will do nothing of the kind. Let me take you to him. Return like a truant child for whom a loving father waits in grave anxiety, ready to forgive and forget, and to kiss the wrong away."

"Oh, if I thought it was so. If I dare to go."

"It is so, believe me; and she who has not the courage to confess an error can expect no mercy. Your husband waits for you with outstretched arms. Let me lead you to him."

She was still on the floor, she still moaned, still wept. Her grief was terribly real, and not Magdalene of old wept more repentant tears. With such eloquence as I was capable of I talked to her, persuaded her, entreated her until my voice prevailed. Then slowly did she

rise. Her eyes were very red; her face very pale. The tornado of grief that had shaken her had left its traces. She looked at me for some moments. She was gathering her voice to speak, but with a shiver and a great convulsive sob that shook her bosom, she could only falter forth.

"Take me, take me," and tottering to the chair, she swooned.

I did not call for assistance. A carafe of water was on the sideboard, and that was all I wanted. In a few minutes she recovered. Then she begged me to let her go and lie down, and she asked me to make preparations for the journey, and tender such excuse as I might think fit to the people of the house. I said I would do this, and I exacted from her a very solemn promise that she would return with me, then I let her go to her room.

I had no difficulty with the people of the house. I explained that Madame Péleterie was not Madame Péleterie, but the heroine of a little romance. They smiled. The French rather like these sort of adventures. They are used to little romances. They call them "*affaires de cœur*." They are regarded as pleasantries that tend to relieve the dull round of monotonous money-grubbing life.

The preparations for our departure were soon made, and that night Mrs. Smith and I were passengers by the Channel steamer. As soon as we reached Dover, I telegraphed to Mr. Smith's doctor, and asked him to be at the house to meet us, and to keep the matter secret until our arrival, and do what he could to stop the gossip and vulgar curiosity of servants. I knew that I could not have a better ally than the doctor, and my confidence was justified.

We reached Richmond in the course of the afternoon. The doctor received the pretty truant. She was pale, tearful, and weary.

"It is a strange coincidence," he whispered to me, "but the villain is here at this very moment, and is with our dear friend Smith. Your triumph will be complete; we can even arrange a little tableau."

He took the lady into the drawing-room, while I proceeded upstairs to Mr. Smith without any announcement, and, knocking at his door, opened it, and entered immediately on his calling "Come in."

The handsome devil Belmont was sitting at the bedside. His white teeth were showing as usual. He was all smiles.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Smith, "this is opportune. I am glad you have come."

Before another word could be spoken, Belmont exclaimed—

"Well, what success, old chappie?"

I thought I detected a tinge of anxiety in his tone. I had not time to answer before Mr. Smith remarked—

"Our good friend here tells me that he has been to Paris, and made every endeavour to get some trace, but failed."

"And you, where have you been to?" cried Belmont, looking at me.

"Oh, I have been to Paris, too." I noted that the smile for once faded from his lips, and a look of anxiety swept over his face.

"And of course you haven't been successful?" he asked with an alarm that he could not conceal.

Without answering him I turned to Mr. Smith, and said—

"Will you pardon me, sir, if I request to have a word in private with Mr. Belmont?"

He inclined his head as an assent.

"Will you kindly follow me, Mr. Belmont, into the passage? I have something to say to you," I continued.

His face grew white. He was no longer smiling. His eyes were restless, and expressed the agitation of his mind.

"What is this farce?" he ejaculated with warmth. He was confused and distressed. He guessed what was coming, and would have liked to have gone up the chimney or sunk through the floor, but that was impossible.

"It is not a farce, sir," I answered, "but a comedy, and serious comedy. Please to come here."

I held the door open, and he went into the passage. Then I whispered to him—

"I have been more successful than you. Leave this house, and never again let your evil shadow fall upon its portals. It is advisable that Mr. Smith should not know of your devilish perfidy, at any rate not at present."

"He looked at me hard for some moments. Then he smiled again, his white teeth gleamed, and he said—

"You are cleverer than I gave you credit for. You score a point. I confess defeat."

He bowed with frigid, cold-blooded disdain, went down the stairs; I followed, and saw the great hall door close behind his retreating figure. Then I went to the drawing-room, and hurriedly imparted the information to the doctor. In a few minutes we ascended the stairs with the lady leaning on our arms.

At the chamber door we paused, and at a sign from me the doctor entered first, and I heard him say to the patient—

"Donovan has a little surprise for you, Mr. Smith."

"Has he? has he? What is it?"

"Come in, Donovan," called out the doctor.

I entered, leading Mrs. Smith by the hand.

"Your wife, sir," I said. "You see I have been a little more successful than your friend."

With a great cry Mrs. Smith sprang forward, fell upon her knees at the bedside, flung her arms about the sick man's neck, and as the doctor and I withdrew I heard her sob out with a passionate wail—

"Husband, husband, forgive me!"

So far as I am concerned the curtain falls upon this *dénouement*. There are some secrets too sacred for prying eyes. Those of Mr. Smith and his wife belong to that category. I need only say he recovered his health, and he and his wife took up their residence in Italy. He did not learn for a long time of the baseness and perfidy of the smiling man whom he regarded as such a true friend. Of course, no action whatever was taken against Belmont. He gave himself away to me. He believed his cleverness was not to be overmatched, and that by coming to me and engaging my services he would divert all possible suspicion from himself. He never dreamed for an instant that he would be bowled out. He had the most perfect faith in himself, and his defeat, therefore, was the more crushing. What became of him I never knew.

A POLISHED IMPOSTOR.

I HAD been ill for some time, and necessarily leading an inactive life, which to one of my disposition and temperament was far from pleasant. I never could bear to be idle long. Some occupation for the mind was indispensable to my well-being, but in this instance I had been forced to submit to the rule of my most excellent physician, who had prescribed with peremptory tyranny "absolute rest and quiet." And so I yielded with the best grace I could. I had thus been running to seed for weeks and trying to concentrate all my thoughts on thinking of nothing; nothing being—as described by a witty Irishman—a footless stocking without a leg. But mental inertia is a very difficult thing to endure by any one who constitutionally loves work for work's sake. It may be imagined, therefore, that I hailed the convalescent stage of my malady with keen delight, and I accepted an invitation from my excellent friend Duncan Smith to be the guest of himself and his family at their charming seaside residence in Helensburgh, down the Clyde. The Smith family consisted of, besides Mrs. Smith, two charming daughters and a son, and as they had travelled extensively and seen a great deal of life they were delightful companions. Mr. Smith was by profession a lawyer, and a member of the old and respected Glasgow firm of Rae, Smith, & Reid, which for many years had enjoyed one of the largest legal practices on the West Coast. It was a wealthy firm, and as Smith, junior, was

following in his father's footsteps and had become a member of the firm, Smith, senior, had practically given up legal work, and was enjoying himself with his books and pictures, both of which were his especial hobby; and as he was no mean hand with the brush and palette himself he found ample means of extracting a vast amount of pleasure out of his well-earned retirement. I found the society of my friends, no less than the quietude and repose of the place, perfectly fascinating, though I confess that there occasionally came over me a longing to tackle once more some of those abstruse puzzles evolved out of human cunning and wickedness which it had been my peculiar *métier* to have to solve. As the dyer's hands become imbued with the trade he works in, so does the mind take its colouring from that which it devotes itself to, and one's thoughts must constantly be turning to those things with which they have been identified for many years. So it was with me, and delightful as my surroundings were, I wanted to be in harness again; for by temperament I was not fitted to resign myself without a murmur to compulsory inactivity. No one could enjoy a holiday more than I could; no one more readily give himself up to restful dreaming, nor enter into a silent communing with Nature, whose most devout of devotees I am, with greater zeal and earnestness than myself. But, then, it is one thing to do this of one's own free will and accord, and another to be forced into it by physical infirmity, which, while incapacitating one, leaves the brain clear and active.

With this exposition of my mental state, it can be readily understood that I thrilled with a sense of unspeakable gratification one morning, as sitting at the breakfast table with my friends, Mr. Smith looked up

from the perusal of his morning letters, and glancing at me over his gold-rimmed glasses with a merry twinkle in his kindly grey eyes, the while he held an open letter in his hand, he said—

"Here is something that will interest you, Donovan. Your services are required, but I think I ought not to show you the letter nor tell you its contents, having regard to Dr. Cadell's injunctions that you were to remain quiet."

"Oh, never mind Dr. Cadell," I said, with an eager laugh. "Doctors are not always right, you know. I am sure a little work will be as a tonic to me. My mind is getting rusty; it wants greasing."

"Well, there is the letter," said Mr. Smith, tossing it towards me, "but remember, I wash my hands of all responsibility in the matter."

Of course I read the letter at once. It ran as follows:—

"179, Buchanan Street, Glasgow.

"My dear Mr. Smith,

"I heard incidentally yesterday from our mutual friend, Mr. Fraser, that the famous detective, Dick Donovan, is at present staying with you as your guest at Helensburgh. It at once occurred to me that he might assist me greatly in a very peculiar case in which I am deeply interested, and which seems to me to offer an unusual opportunity for the exercise of those remarkable talents which your friend possesses in such an unique degree. It would occupy too much time for me to enter into all the details and particulars of the case I refer to. I will, therefore, content myself with saying that while on the face of it it seems commonplace enough, there are inner depths, which, if we can only manage to explore, we may be able to make a startling revela-

tion. As I do not know Mr. Donovan personally, and, moreover, as Fraser told me he is only now recovering from severe illness, I thought it better to write to you in the first instance, and leave it to you to decide whether it would be advisable to bring the matter under the notice of your guest.

"I hope that you and your wife and charming daughters are in the enjoyment of perfect health. Accept for them and yourself my very kindest regards. I wish I could have spent a few days with you in this glorious weather. A cruise with you and the ladies in your yacht round the beautiful Island of Arran, or among the no less beautiful Kyles of Bute, is a delight that no one can help yearning for; but alas! at present I am chained hand and foot to the oar. My partner is away ill; so is my manager and confidential clerk. The result is, I cannot leave the business for a single day. If it had not been for this, I would have gone down to Helensburgh and have made Mr. Donovan's acquaintance. As it is, I will place the affair in your hands. You will be the best judge as to the proper course to take, and I hope you will not think me guilty of a liberty in intruding myself upon your guest.

"Yours very truly,

"James Dougal Fleming."

"Who is Mr. James Dougal Fleming?" I asked, as I handed the letter back to Mr. Smith.

"Well, he is a very old friend of mine, and in practice as a lawyer. He is an excellent fellow, with an original mind, and he often sees things that are obscured to other men."

"And you think that when he speaks of a case being peculiar it has features out of the common?"

"Oh, yes; there is not the slightest doubt about that. You may depend upon it that what Fleming thinks peculiar is so. He is exceedingly clever, and devoted to his profession, and he does everything with such zeal that he is working himself to death."

"He pays me a very high compliment," I remarked, "and I feel flattered. Now, as your guest, may I ask permission to go and see your friend?"

"Oh, my dear Donovan, it is a matter in which you must use your own discretion," Mr. Smith replied. "Personally, I should be very glad for you to go, but on the other hand I am thinking of Dr. Cadell's orders and your own health."

"Pray do not let those considerations give you any concern. I shall be the better for some work. Moreover, I am desirous of assisting your friend if I can."

"Very well, do as you like," came the cheery answer; "you will find him a man after your own heart, and I am convinced he has something interesting to tell you."

This was sufficient. I needed nothing more. My weakness seemed to leave me at the mere thought of getting congenial occupation for the mind, and I preferred a request to my friend Smith that he would write to Mr. Fleming and say I would call upon him on the morrow.

The morrow came. I duly presented myself at Mr. Fleming's office, and was at once shown into his presence. I found him to be a somewhat portly man, with hair inclining to grey, and those deep-set, smallish eyes, capable of looking at you fixedly, and yet with a suspicion of dreaminess about them that is inseparable from the thinking mind. Mr. Fleming greeted me very cordially.

"It is extremely good, indeed, of you to come," he said, "especially as I understand you are still an invalid. But the fact is, hearing you were so near Glasgow, I could not resist the temptation to ask you to help me."

I hastened to assure him that it would afford me great satisfaction to do so if he thought I could be any of use, and he proceeded—

"I won't worry you then with unnecessary details, but go at once to my subject. Some weeks ago a young woman named Jessie Macfarlane was arrested on suspicion of having been concerned in an hotel robbery at the Bridge of Allan, and she has been committed for trial, which will take place next month. She pleads not guilty, although caught almost *flagrante delicto*.

"Now, notwithstanding that in my view there is strong reason to believe she is either a tool of somebody, or that she had confederates, she preserves the most stolid silence, and refuses to give the slightest explanation, or say anything in her defence beyond that she is not guilty. I may tell you that she is a native of Glasgow, and the daughter of highly respectable people. Her father has been for many years foreman in the machine-room of Shepheard, Ridgefield, & Alexander, the printers, and they speak in the very highest terms of him. Her mother has been in the service of Sir John Freemantle as cook for over ten years, and is greatly esteemed by her employer as well as by her fellow-servants. These honest people have brought up a family of eight children; all have done and are doing well except Jessie, and the charge hanging over her head has all but distracted her parents, who have placed the matter in my hands with a request that

I will do everything possible to get Jessie acquitted. I am handicapped, however, by the girl's own stolid indifference, or apparent indifference, and I have come to the conclusion that she is under some very powerful influence which seals her lips, and that she is willing to suffer rather than say a word that would implicate somebody in whom she is interested."

"Was she in service in the hotel where the robbery was committed?" I asked.

"No; and that is not the least curious part of the business. She was in the service of a lady and gentleman on a visit there, not husband and wife, but brother and sister—a Mr. William John Holliwell and Miss Martha Holliwell. They are people of high social standing and considerable means. Jessie Macfarlane was maid to the lady, in whose service she had been for four years, and Miss Holliwell gives her a most excellent character."

"This is extremely interesting," I remarked thoughtfully as the lawyer paused in his narration, and I requested him to give me the details of the robbery, which he did as follows:—

"It appears that staying in the hotel were Major-General and Mrs. Hoy. The General is an Indian officer home on sick leave, and he and his wife had been staying at the Bridge for the benefit of their health. They had two servants with them—a man-servant and a maid, by the name of Harriet Shawcross, who was in India with them. Mrs. Hoy is a showy woman and fond of jewellery, of which she sports a quantity. One afternoon, while the General and his wife were out for a drive, the maid went to the lady's room to get her things ready for dinner. This was her daily habit, it seems, but on this particular afternoon, when she un-

locked her mistress's trunk to get out the jewel-case, she was alarmed to find that it was not there, and yet she was certain she had put it back the previous night after Mrs. Hoy had taken her jewels off on retiring. As the case contained between four and five hundred pounds' worth of geegaws, you may imagine that Harriet Shawcross was in a state of considerable alarm, although there were no signs then indicative of robbery. But the disappearance of the case from its usual place was sufficiently remarkable to cause her great uneasiness. Until the return of her mistress, however, who might possibly have removed the case herself—though Harriet considered that unlikely—she could do nothing. But having laid out the lady's clothes ready for use, she left the room to go downstairs, but had only proceeded a few yards down the passage when she remembered that she had left the keys of the boxes lying on the dressing-table, so she at once turned back for them. On opening the door she was thunderstruck to find a woman standing in the room, and that woman was Jessie Macfarlane. 'What are you doing here?' demanded Harriet Shawcross. Jessie, who was trembling and confused, stammered out that she had made a mistake and came into the wrong room. Harriet at once accused her of falsehood, for she herself had only been a few yards away from the door, and during those few brief moments the intruder could not have entered without Harriet knowing it. She had a dishevelled appearance, too, which was suggestive of having crept from under the bed; and as she seemed strange and excited, Harriet rang the bell violently, and, never losing sight of the girl, insisted on the landlord giving her into custody. During this little scene the General and his wife returned, and when they heard what had happened, and

as the jewel-case was not forthcoming, they sent for a policeman, and Jessie was taken to the station. There she was searched, but nothing incriminating was found upon her. The room was also searched, but no trace of the missing jewel-case was discovered. Now, here was a conjunction of circumstances that was certainly mysterious. Firstly, a valuable lot of jewellery had disappeared; and, secondly, a girl was found in the room who had no business to be in that part of the house at all, for her master and mistress's rooms were right on the other side of the house, and everything seemed to point to the fact that she had been concealed there for some time. It was so very obvious that she had not gone into the room accidentally, that is, by mistake, that her excuse was ridiculous. Recognizing that herself, no doubt, she did not urge it, but preserved an obstinate silence, and refused to answer any questions.

"As soon as her parents heard of her arrest they went to see her, but she was as obstinate with them as she had been with every one else; and while stoutly persisting in her innocence, she declined to offer any explanation as to how it was she came to be in the room under such suspicious circumstances. Believing that she was the victim of some delusion, or that she had suffered from a temporary aberration, they came to me imploring me to do what I could for the girl. I have had several interviews with her, but I honestly confess that she is a puzzle that I can make nothing of."

"The jewellery has not been recovered?" I asked.

"Not a scrap."

"What is your opinion of the girl?"

"Well—I believe that if she is not the absolute thief, she knows who is. Now, I should like to hear your opinion."

"I can hardly give you one at present, but I will go this far. There is a good deal more in this matter than appears on the surface. I agree with you that on the face of it it seems commonplace enough, but there is a deeper depth that must be explored, and very probably that will disclose something startling."

"Well, now, will you undertake to explore that depth?" asked Mr. Fleming. "Naturally, I am desirous of doing the best I can for my clients, for they are terribly cast down by the disgrace their daughter has brought upon them; but, apart from that, I should like to get at the bottom of what is undoubtedly a mystery."

"Yes," I answered, "I will, for the problem is very interesting, and I should be pleased to work it out."

On this understanding I left Mr. Fleming, very much absorbed in what he had told me, and the next day I obtained permission to visit Jessie in prison. She was not prepossessing by any means, but Nature had endowed her with a most perfect figure. Her face, however, was somewhat flat, and her expression in repose dull and heavy. But I found after a time that under the influence of excitement or emotion the expression gave place to one of great animation. Then her rather large and too prominent, dreamy eyes lighted up, her cheeks flushed, and she appeared to be quite another being. Her movements, except under excitement, were sluggish; and while she did not strike me as being particularly bright intellectually, she was very far from dull-witted, and I set her down as peculiarly secretive for a woman, with a great amount of artfulness that bordered more or less on a rather dangerous form of cunning. She had a good and fair complexion, and a quantity of reddish-brown hair that in itself was

attractive. But in other respects there was something about her that rather repelled one. It is really difficult to say in what that something consisted of. It is best suggested, perhaps, by describing her as quite lacking in that soft, confiding nature which one likes to see in a woman, especially a young woman. There was a hardness about the mouth and a certain cynical coldness which a man does not like to see in a woman.

"I may at once say, Jessie," I began, "that I have come here to see you in your own interests, and on behalf of those who love you——"

"Who are you?" she demanded, with a peremptory haughtiness that somewhat astonished me, having regard to the fact that I had told her I was there in her own interest, and on behalf of her friends. Under ordinary circumstances a prisoner with a grave charge hanging over her would have expressed some gratification, some thankfulness, on hearing that efforts were being made to release her, or, at any rate, to mitigate her position. But not so Jessie Macfarlane. She looked at me with a scowl, and there was an angry sullenness in her face. In answer to her demand, I at once made myself known to her. She had never heard my name before, which, if I had been given to vanity, might have caused me some concern. But it didn't, and with a smile I said—

"I am sorry, Jessie, that I am such an utter stranger to you. Let me assure you, however, that I am desirous of assisting you——"

"I don't want your assistance," she exclaimed angrily.

"But surely you would like to be cleared of this dreadful charge, if it is possible to clear you."

"I have told them I am innocent," she replied, with unsubdued force of expression.

"Yes, but it is necessary to prove your innocence. A mere statement is not proof."

"In my case it is, so you needn't trouble yourself further."

"How is a bare denial different in your case to what it would be in anybody else's?" I asked.

"I deny that I am guilty. They've got to prove me guilty, and they can't do it," she answered, with a cynical sneer.

"But you were in the room?"

"Yes."

"Well, that in itself, *ipso facto*, is *primâ facie* evidence of guilt."

"Don't speak in a foreign language to me," she growled. "I don't understand it."

"Pardon me," I answered, with a bow. "I apologize. What I mean is that your having been found in the room under suspicious circumstances is in itself a grave matter."

"Well, then, they can think what they like."

"But surely, Jessie, you can offer some plausible explanation as to why you were in the room?"

"I have already said that I went in by mistake."

"You could hardly have done that."

"Do you mean to say that I lie?" she asked angrily, while her face grew red, and her eyes were filled with a glowing light of inward passion.

"It is not for me to say that you do or do not," I replied with some force, thinking to impress her with the stupidity of her conduct, but its only effect was to make her more angry, and she said—

"Whether I lie, or whether I don't, is my own business, not yours."

"But I want to make it mine."

"Then you won't succeed."

"Do you not understand, Jessie, that I have come here entirely in your own interests?"

"Perhaps you have, but I don't want you."

"But you cannot afford to ignore assistance in the sad position in which you are placed."

"Oh yes, I can," she answered, with a toss of her head.

"How so?"

"Because I am innocent."

"Good. For argument's sake we will admit that you are. But you will have to satisfy a judge that you are. How are you going to do that?"

"It is they who have to prove me guilty, and how are *they* going to do it?" she asked, with an exultant laugh.

"It is within the bounds of possibility," I answered, "that the prosecution may fail to prove you guilty, but though legally you might be acquitted, it would only be for the want of evidence, and you would be branded with an indelible moral stain!"

"Oh, what do I care for that!"

I looked at her with surprise. She certainly was a study, and though to some extent I had been prepared by what Mr. Fleming had told me to find her obdurate and even stupid, I scarcely expected she would prove so utterly illogical as to thus stand in her own light. She behaved almost like one who was hardened in crime, and her extraordinary artfulness was shown in the fact that she knew the onus of establishing her guilt, if she was guilty, was entirely with the prosecution, and as the jewels had not been traced to her possession, and the only serious item against her was that she had been found in the room, the difficulty in the way of securing

a conviction was great indeed, and no magistrate would convict unless he had clear proof that she had really stolen the jewels. Now, there were many features in the case which removed it out of the ordinary. Firstly, the trunk in which the jewel-case was kept was locked when Harriet Shawcross went to it, because she carried the keys and used them to open the trunk. Therefore it followed that if the jewel-case had been abstracted from the trunk, the trunk must have been opened with false keys. Where were those keys? They were not found in the room nor on Jessie Macfarlane's person. This seemed to suggest that the robbery had been committed sometime before. But then arose the question, what was the girl doing in the room?

Having neither jewels nor keys upon her, it would be legally impossible, unless other evidence was forthcoming, to convict the girl of being the thief, however much suspicion might point to her as the guilty person. But the law is very decisive on this point. It says in effect, "Before we can convict a person of crime we must have such evidence, circumstantial or otherwise, as would leave no logical or reasonable doubt of the guilt of the accused. In this instance, although the woman is found in a room from which valuable property has been removed, there is not beyond that fact—and it is a suspicious fact—a scrap of evidence to prove her guilt."

I saw all these points at a glance, and they served to invest the matter with a certain amount of mystery which made it doubly interesting to me. I had by this time come to the conclusion in my own mind that Jessie Macfarlane was under the subjugation of some subtle influence, some stronger will than her own. And so I asked her suddenly and with a certain sternness—

"Jessie Macfarlane, you are not alone in this matter?"

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed, with flashing eyes.

"Surely my meaning is plain enough. You are acting under the influence of another person."

"Am I?" she sneered. "Dear me, how very clever you are! But for once you are wrong."

"I am not wrong, Jessie, but right. Now, if you wish to save yourself, tell me who your evil mentor is."

She laughed bitterly, as she answered—

"You are trying to probe me, but you won't succeed. I assert that I am innocent; and all the magistrates and all the detectives in the world can't prove me guilty. I am not going to denounce any one, because I have no one to denounce."

"Are you really desirous of going to prison?" I asked.

"Certainly not."

"Then why don't you aid me in trying to establish your innocence?"

"My innocence is established, because no one can prove me guilty."

"But you were found in the room?"

"I was."

"What were you there for?"

"That is my business."

"How long had you been in the room when Harriet Shawcross saw you?"

She remained dumb for some minutes, and it seemed as if she had no intention of replying; but then with a sudden gesture of impatience, and still with that angry look in her eyes, she answered me thus—

"Look here, Mr. Donovan, I am satisfied that you mean well, and are wishful to help me; but I don't want your help. The magistrate will be compelled to acquit me. Therefore, what more do I require? Now, I will answer your questions straight if it is any satisfaction to you. The only falsehood I have told is in saying I had just gone into the room when the Hoys' maid saw me there. The fact is I had been in the room for some time, and lying under the bed. It was a freak, a stupid freak, and nothing more, and nothing more can be made of it, twist things as you like. Now, if I had false keys, why were they not found upon me, and if I had abstracted the jewel-case, where was it? I hadn't swallowed it, and it wasn't in the room. The fact of the jewels being stolen and my being found in the room was a coincidence, nothing more."

"But a singularly unfortunate one for you," I remarked.

"Yes, I admit that, but I cannot help it."

"And yet you can offer some plausible reason for your having hidden under the bed?"

"No, I cannot."

"On what grounds do you refuse?"

"On grounds personal to myself."

"It is personal to yourself to use every endeavour to clear your good name of the slur that now rests upon it."

"I have told you over and over again that I am innocent."

"So you may be, but I wish you to establish that."

"I shall do no more than I have done, and you must make the best of my answer," she said.

"Nevertheless, I seriously and solemnly urge you to

explain why you had been concealed under the bed in General Hoy's room."

"I shall do nothing of the kind beyond saying that it was a freak. Now, pray leave me, and tell my father and mother that they needn't concern themselves. I shall come out of the matter all right."

Although I put other questions to her she sullenly refused to answer them; and as she was in a peculiar and irritable mood, I felt it might be advisable to leave her for the present. I did so with a conviction that she was an exceedingly artful young woman, and possessed of a certain strength of purpose which, in the ordinary way, it might be difficult to overcome. But I was also convinced of another thing, and it was that behind Jessie Macfarlane stood somebody else, and that somebody was influencing her by some strange power of will. Who that somebody was I determined to learn, and also to find out, if it could be found out, where the jewel-case had been taken, who had taken it, and where it had gone to.

If the problem was not as abstruse as many I had had to deal with, it was distinguished by some very remarkable features, and not the least of them was the psychological phenomena which Jessie Macfarlane herself presented.

As regards the probable issue of this really interesting case my mind at that moment was a blank. I might have hazarded a good many speculations, each one of which would likely have been wide of the mark, but I could not swerve from the position I had taken up with reference to Jessie being a mere tool, swayed and influenced by some subtle brain that had in it "the damnable essence of devilish craft," as an old and vigorous writer aptly phrases his description of that

class of wickedness which seeks to mask its own nefarious designs by trading on and utilizing the weakness of another person. At the same time, let me at once assert that I did not believe in Jessie Macfarlane's asseverations of innocence. Her denial of guilt was one of those white lies which certain people think carry no responsibility. By a distortion of common-sense logic she may have endeavoured to persuade herself that she was non-culpable because she was not a free agent. But such sophistry—while it might answer the purpose of some claptrap political spouter—was not admissible in cases where the law of the land had been outraged. There are degrees of guilt, of course, but a person who is not an absolute idiot cannot shift entire responsibility from his shoulders for transgression on the plea that he was prompted thereto by an influence he could not resist. Nominally we are all able to resist evil, though that argument is just as fallacious as the other, but the law recognizes it. The law, however, as most people know, is often a mere fossilized conglomeration of stupid and barbarous forms, and illogical logic, in which common sense is frequently utterly ignored.

The foregoing observations clearly express the views I held at this stage of the proceedings, when, after my interview with the prisoner, I set out on my quest to find a solution of such mystery as there was about the affair, and I think it will be admitted, even by the most hardened and hopeless of critics, that there *was* sufficient mystery to remove the case from the region of commonplace. Mr. Fleming, who was shrewd and far-seeing, clearly recognized that, and it was the *soupçon* of mystery which had puzzled him, and induced him to solicit my aid.

My next step was to seek an interview with Mr.

and Miss Martha Holliwell, in whose service Jessie Macfarlane had been at the time of the theft of the jewels. Of course they had left the Bridge and returned to their home in Edinburgh, where they occupied a flat in the neighbourhood of St. George's Square. I found that Mr. Holliwell was away. He had gone on a business journey to the Continent, so I was informed. But I saw his sister, a hard-featured lady on the wrong side of forty, with a cynical mouth, and a generally soured expression, as if she had found life a mistake and one long disappointment. She displayed great reluctance to talk about Jessie Macfarlane and the charge hanging over her head. But I gathered that Jessie had been with her as her maid for over three years, and she had not a single complaint to make against her. She was very much shocked when she heard of the charge, and she thought at the time, and thought so still, that there had been some stupid blunder; and, while admitting that the fact of the girl being found in the room was a very awkward one, she was of opinion that it was capable of easy explanation, though she would not venture to suggest an explanation.

I left Miss Holliwell with a decided prejudice against her. She seemed so cold, unsympathetic, and withal so reserved that it appeared as if when she spoke she spoke nothing but words, and the thoughts of her mind found no utterance. This remark will convey a word of meaning to those who have made the tricks of the human mind a study.

Of course I was more than anxious now to see Mr. Holliwell, but I had to wait some days before he returned from the Continent. I found him a very striking contrast indeed to his sister. He had rather a

coarse face, but an irresistible and fascinating manner and polished mode of speaking that was peculiarly pleasant to the ear. Ninety-nine people out of every hundred would have pronounced Mr. Holliwell a really charming man; and charming he was and affable to a degree, and without apparently that reserve which was such an unpleasant feature in his sister.

He received me with a degree of affability and cordiality that was quite impressive, and he displayed the most warm-hearted sympathy with the accused person.

"The fact is she is rather a weak woman," he observed, with a pleasant smile, "and obstinate to a remarkable degree. She has always impressed me with an idea that having made up her mind to a certain thing, no amount of reasoning or persuasion would induce her to alter it."

"May I suggest that there is a contradiction in terms there?" I remarked. "You say she is weak, and yet you believe she has such a strong and defiant will that nothing can warp it from its inclination."

"Oh yes," he exclaimed, with a laugh, "that is so, but I hold that her strength in this respect is her great weakness."

"I admit the nicety of your argument," I said, "which carries with it a very logical distinction; but are you prepared with a suggestion that will explain why she was found in Major-General Hoy's room under such suspicious circumstances, and at the time when an amount of valuable property was missing?"

"I am not prepared with any suggestion," he answered, with a laugh.

"Do *you* think her guilty?"

"I have an open mind on that point," he replied.

"But one thing I feel quite clear about, and that is her acquittal is a certainty."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because there is no convicting evidence."

"How do you support that statement?"

"Well, firstly, the jewels were not found upon her, were they?"

"No."

"Nor any false keys?"

"True again."

"And yet the trunk must have been opened with false keys, for the lock was intact."

"That is so."

"Very well, if she had just stolen the jewel-case when she was found in the room, what had she done with the jewels? Where were the false keys?"

He asked this with a triumphant sort of chuckle, as though he thought it effectually clinched his argument, and placed the whole matter out of the range of further controversy.

"That is a question I am not prepared at this moment to answer," I said.

"Ah, just so; but in the absence of an answer—and it certainly seems to me that no answer can be forthcoming—conviction cannot possibly ensue, and the girl will be discharged."

"A result that you will be gratified with, Mr. Holliwell," I suggested.

"Certainly I shall."

"And in that case will the girl be retained in your sister's service?"

"I think so. Undoubtedly."

So far my object in interviewing Mr. Holliwell had been fulfilled, and I saw nothing to be gained by

prolonging the interview. I therefore rose to go. He put forth his hand with great affability and shook mine, and just as I was in the act of departing he exclaimed—

"By the way, Mr. Donovan, I suppose you haven't got any trace whatever of the missing jewel-case?"

"Not a trace," I observed, whereat he smiled, and with the most gracious politeness bowed me out; and as I descended the stairs in a very thoughtful mood I added mentally to the answer I had made to him—"I shall *get* a trace though, and discover where the jewels have gone to."

The reader will probably wonder why I was so definite on this point at that moment, and in a little while I shall proceed to explain. At present it is better to work the narrative out with a due regard for the proper sequel.

My next step was to go down to the Bridge of Allan and call upon the landlord of the hotel in whose house the robbery had been committed. I asked him to allow me to see the room that had been occupied by Major-General Hoy and his wife. This request was, of course, readily granted, and my inspection resulted in an important discovery. The room was lighted by two windows, one of them being a long French window that opened on to an iron balcony, and the balcony communicated with the adjoining room. This offered a solution of one part of the puzzle at least, and I at once asked the landlord if the room adjoining the Hoys' was occupied on the day of the robbery. A reference to his books proved conclusively that it was not. Here again was an important point scored, and it was easy to work out the following theory:—

Jessie Macfarlane had opened the trunk with a duplicate key; had abstracted the case and handed that

and the key to a second person in waiting on the balcony; and that person escaped by way of the unoccupied room. That Jessie failed to escape was due in all probability to her hearing somebody coming, and deeming it too late and too risky to rush on to the balcony, she had dived under the bed. Her exit from that dusty retreat, in which she must have been very cramped and uncomfortable, as soon as she heard Harriet Shawcross leave the room, proved to be a little premature and unfortunately for her; for, as the reader knows, Harriet returned almost immediately for the keys she had left lying on the dressing table. I ascertained further that the weather at that period was very warm, and it was exceedingly probable the balcony window had been left open for the purpose of airing and ventilating the room. Let us assume this, and it will be seen that all I have suggested would be easy enough.

I asked the landlord if he had had any previous acquaintance with the Holliwells, and he informed me that he knew nothing about them before they came to his hotel on that occasion. As their boxes bore the labels of a great many hotels, he concluded that they were people who travelled a great deal. He was not particularly impressed with Miss Holliwell, but he was greatly charmed with her brother, who was a general favourite. In reply to a further question of mine, the landlord gave me the names of several of the hotels mentioned on the labels. I made a note of these. Amongst them were a Liverpool, a Manchester, and a London hotel. Selecting these three, I wrote to the respective managers asking if they had had any complaints of visitors in the hotel being robbed. From Manchester I got a negative answer; but from Liverpool and London came the information that in each house

there had been an extensive robbery of jewellery, but though every effort had been made to trace the thief, it had proved unavailing.

The pieces of the puzzle were now fitting in admirably, and I was more confident than ever that I should succeed in mastering the whole thing, and exposing a very clever system of felony. As Jessie Macfarlane's trial was drawing near, Mr. Fleming displayed considerable anxiety to know what I had done, and in the course of a conversation I had with him I said—

"I am gradually solving the mystery, but as I haven't quite succeeded yet, I should prefer to reserve my statement for a later period. But there is one thing you can make up your mind to, Mr. Fleming, and that is Jessie Macfarlane is not quite the innocent lamb she represents herself to be."

"But there isn't a scrap of evidence against her beyond the fact that she was found in the room," exclaimed Mr. Fleming.

"I agree with you that that fact alone would not suffice to secure a conviction."

"Then Jessie will, of course, be acquitted of the charge."

"Hardly so, I think," was my reply.

"But how in the name of goodness can the woman be detained if there is no evidence?"

"I contend that there will be evidence."

"Ah, that is another thing," remarked the lawyer reflectively. "It implies, of course, that you have got hold of something. I confess that for her parents' sake I shall be very sorry if Jessie is proved guilty."

"I think," said I, "that it will be found Jessie is not such a black sinner as she would appear now, and it may become a nice point of law as to how far she is

culpable. My own impression is that Jessie is much more a fool than a knave. At any rate, I am going to see her again to-morrow, and after that I may have something important to communicate to you."

On this understanding I left Mr. Fleming, and, in accordance with my plan, I obtained an interview on the following day with the prisoner. She was in a somewhat different frame of mind than when I had seen her last, and before I could say anything she exclaimed—

"Have you found out anything against me?"

The tone of anxiety in which this question was put was too obvious to be overlooked, and the scared, appealing look in her eyes gave point and expression to her tone. It was very evident that the imprisonment had told upon her. She was less obdurate. The time she had had for reflection had probably convinced her that the *rôle* of martyr was not quite the one which would advantage her most.

"I have not found out much," I said, in answer to her question, and at that I saw her face brighten a little. "But, now, I want you to give me straightforward replies to two or three questions I must put to you, and you may rest assured that it will be to your benefit to answer me truthfully and to the best of your knowledge."

"Well, what are the questions?" she said, with a show of jauntiness.

"You travelled about the country with your master and mistress a good deal, did you not?"

"Yes."

"You were in Liverpool with them?"

"I was."

"And London?"

"Yes."

"Is it within your knowledge that at the hotels you and they stayed in Liverpool and London robberies of jewellery took place?"

"No," she answered in a subdued voice, and averting her face from me. And I felt absolutely sure, as sure as a man could be who had nothing else but appearances and inferences to go by, that she did not speak the truth.

"Very well," I said; "now tell me, did you ever go on the Continent with Mr. Holliwell?"

"Never."

"But you are aware that he was in the habit of going?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where he went to?"

"To Antwerp, I believe, and sometimes to Amsterdam."

"Did you ever hear at what hotel or boarding-house he stayed at in either of these two places?"

She looked at me with an angry flashing of the eyes, and asked with emphasized indignation—

"How do you suppose it's likely that I know anything about my master's business?"

"I may suppose a good many things," I said, "and all my suppositions be wrong; but if you will take my advice—and, believe me, I advise you in your own interests—you will not withhold the information I seek if it is in your power to give it."

She tried for a moment to look hard and angry, but failed completely, and, overcome by her feelings, she burst into tears; sinking down on the stool allowed her for a seat, she covered her face with her hands. I allowed

her a little breathing time, then I urged her again to tell me, and at last she sobbed out—

"When he was in Antwerp he used to stay, I have heard, at the hotel called the—the—Dangle something, I forget the name now."

I was puzzled at first to know what the "Dangle" might mean, but suddenly it flashed upon me, and I suggested "D'Angleterre," whereupon Jessie, with a sigh of relief as it were, said, "Yes, I am sure that is the name."

So far my point was made, and after a few admonitory words to the unhappy young woman I prepared to go. But just as I was in the act of leaving the place she started up with a distressed and anxious expression of countenance and exclaimed—

"Tell me—oh, do tell me if I shall be kept in prison?"

This was a promising sign. It showed that fear of punishment was having its effect, and that she by no means viewed her future prospects with that equanimity which she had displayed during my first interview with her.

"Well, Jessie," I answered, "it all depends upon the measure of guilt that is proved against you, and the course that you yourself may adopt."

"But they can prove nothing against *me*," she cried, with a much greater show of anxiety than she had hitherto exhibited.

"If you depend upon that, you may find that you are leaning upon a rotten reed," I answered solemnly; whereupon she once more sank down on her stool and wept bitterly, and I deemed it advisable to leave her in that state.

The succeeding step in the process of disentanglement

of this rather knotty case was a visit I paid to Antwerp; for the reader who has followed me thus far will have no doubt determined for himself that such a step was imperative if the theory on which I was working was to be traced out to its logical conclusion. I was prepared to learn at the Hôtel d'Angleterre, Antwerp, that no such person was known there as Mr. Holliwell, but when I exhibited a photograph of that gentleman, which I had taken the precaution to provide myself with, he was recognized as a Monsieur Hertois, "a French commercial traveller in the employ of an English firm." On this hint I acted. "Monsieur Hertois" was now doubly interesting to me, for in Monsieur Hertois was embodied the person of Mr. Holliwell, and Mr. Holliwell was without doubt a scoundrel. By piecing little details together I was enabled to make up a connected plan, as it were, of this gentleman's movements while in Belgium; and by this plan it was clearly demonstrated that he had disposed of various parcels of jewellery, one of which was unmistakably composed of the various articles stolen from Major-General Hoy during his stay in the Bridge of Allan hotel.

So far the puzzle was all but complete, and I returned to Glasgow, where I lost no time in acquainting Mr. Fleming with my success. Before laying information against the polished rascal who had not scrupled to make a tool of the silly and weak girl then languishing in prison, Mr. Fleming hurried off to see Jessie and acquaint her of the fact that Holliwell's villainy had been unmasked, and that if she wished to mitigate the punishment which in all probability would be apportioned to her, it would be advisable for her to aid him by making a clean breast of all she knew. As

might have been expected, her obduracy broke down, and, weeping penitently, she said she had completely fallen under the spell Holliwell had woven about her. He had secretly promised to marry her on condition that she would aid him in his nefarious schemes, and her position enabled her to scrape acquaintance with servants of visitors in hotels, whereby she found out where valuables were kept. My theory of the robbery at the Bridge of Allan turned out to be the correct one in every particular. Holliwell had provided her with a duplicate key of the trunk. Then she had abstracted the jewel-case and handed it and the key to her instigator, who was waiting on the balcony. She had no time to beat a safe retreat herself, so dived under the bed, and that movement proved her undoing, as well as being the ultimate means of stopping Holliwell in his career of felony. I may at once state that the sequel of this little story is, he was duly tried and sentenced to a considerable term of imprisonment. When the details of his career were worked out, he proved to be a thoroughly unprincipled scoundrel, whose polished manner and good address had served him in good stead. There was a certain fascination, too, about him that could not fail to make such a woman as Jessie Macfarlane an easy prey. It goes without saying, of course, that she was pitiably weak and lamentably foolish. But she represents a large class of silly people who, not content with the position in which circumstances have placed them, aim at higher things for which they are totally unfitted, and find when too late that they have overshot the mark. Example, however, rarely has a deterrent effect, otherwise there would be few wrong-doers in the world, and it is hardly to be expected that Jessie's fate will prevent others from

walking blindly into the net which is ever spread to trap the unwary. But, if I might be allowed to add a moral, I would say, better a thousand times honest poverty than ill-gotten gains. Nothing could be proved against Holliwell's sister, though it is morally certain that she could not have been entirely ignorant of the course her clever but disreputable brother was pursuing. As for his victim, she was fortunate in becoming an object of that compassionate sentiment which is so often displayed in a Scotch Court. Being regarded as a mere tool, and having already suffered imprisonment, she was discharged—a wiser, let us hope, if not a sadder woman.

My part in the affair being ended, I went back to my good friends at Helensburgh for two or three weeks, though I was none the worse for the little excitement I had gone through.

THE END.

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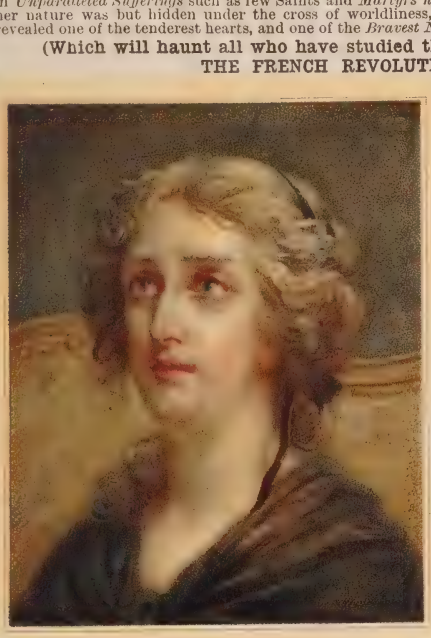

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